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**WY Open: A Grassroots Open Educational Resources Initiative**

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A Grassroots Open Educational Resources Initiative
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NUTRITION INFORMATION
This recipe describes starting a library-led open educational resources (OER) as a mechanism to recognize and promote cost-savings for students while allowing faculty to tailor their learning materials to specific pedagogy needs. The grassroots approach is best implemented alongside existing organizational infrastructures. At the University of Wyoming (UW), the OER initiative developed without a dedicated position or home department but rather a collaborative foundation across the libraries which builds momentum, spreads the message, and ultimately the workload.

LEARNING OUTCOMES/PROJECT OUTCOMES
Librarians who work closely with OER initiatives will:
• Assess impacts on equity and access for students using OER course materials.
• Engage with teaching faculty on innovative solutions to curriculum goals.
• Diversify library collections in order to further continued and ethical access to information.

NUMBER SERVED
Serving size is adjustable according to available ingredients! At a medium-sized public university, anticipate serving approximately 2,000 students (dependent on course capacity) from the first two years of an initiative once around thirty grants are fully prepared and cooked. To scale the number of grant awards per semester, consider available funding and types of OER implementation (adoption, adaptation, creation). Encourage collaborative work among faculty and graduate students in grant applications in order to build-in support for implementation and mirror grassroots efforts across the campus community.

COOKING TIME
Allow 6 to 7 months for preparation, 4 to 6 months of cooking time (includes intensive marketing and meetings with faculty), and 1 month per grant award cycle for related clean-up (communication with recipients, delivering and announcing awards).

DIETARY GUIDELINES
An OER initiative can enhance the libraries’ values of “Exploration and Discovery” and “Innovation and Application” (University of Wyoming Libraries, 2018). Such values seek to provide equitable access to information, open access content, and to promote student success and lifelong learning. This recipe addresses the impact of an OER initiative on student learning through free or low-cost course materials while providing day one access, which ties to both precarity and equity considerations for underrepresented student populations.

INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT
• Grassroots support and expertise from librarians
• Formal backing and funding from library administration
• Dedicated time for background research and to outline processes
• Curated online resources and branded web presence
• Marketing expertise and promotional plan
• Institutional repository infrastructure for completed OER
• Production software
  – Adobe Acrobat Pro or alternative for producing indexed and chaptered pdf content
Section II. Open Educational Resources

- Software allowing for export of textual content to popular epub formats
- Audacity for recording and editing audio
- Video editing software (Adobe Premiere, CyberLink PowerDirector, Apple iMovie, HitFilm Express)
- 3D modeling software (Blender, Maya, Meshmixer, Meshlab, MetaShape)
- 3D model hosting platform (Sketchfab, Thingiverse, NIH 3D Print Exchange, etc.)

• Production hardware
  - High-quality microphones and soundproof space
  - High-quality video recorders, lights, and green screens
  - 2D / 3D scanning equipment

PREPARATION
Secure support from librarians as an essential first step to establishing an OER grant initiative. Garnier their support through organizational channels that already facilitate the librarians’ work, such as monthly faculty meetings. Once librarians are on board, draft a concise proposal outlining the initiative for the library administration. Take care to align the proposal with the libraries’ strategic plan, including some basics of OER as well as information about how OER can be a considerable cost-savings measure for students. Proposal details could include the following:
  • Development of grants to faculty for adoption, adaptation, and creation of OER textbooks in their courses
  • Creation of an OER committee within the library to review grant applications and coordinate initiative programming
  • Addition of OER titles to the catalog, such as titles from the Open Textbook Network and Knowledge Unlatched
  • Speaker series of experts, including
    – OER workshops delivered to interested students, faculty, staff, and librarians
    – Future symposium for teaching faculty, to include a guest speaker on OER, a panel report from mini-grant recipients, and workshops about implementing OER

After the proposal is sent to administration, schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss details. Plan for an initial funding request (e.g., $25,000) to cover grants for faculty at different amounts depending upon the effort required to adopt, adapt, or create an OER text for a given course. Set aside other monies to pay for annual campus professional development, such as an OER symposium. Once the proposal is approved, form an OER committee that includes representation from numerous departments like collection development, research and instruction, and digital collections. In addition, consider recruiting teaching faculty to serve on this committee. This committee will oversee the development and implementation of the initiative. Keep the committee small in membership to reduce administrative burden. A committee of three or five members is ideal: the odd number will be optimal at later stages of the initiative for tasks such as grant proposal reviewing. While OER initiatives often originate from within upper administration, a grassroots effort should be initiated by librarians across departments. This broad base of support will establish a strong foundation for moving the initiative forward.

Initial research to plan for the initiative involves identifying existing library services and capacity along with an environmental scan of higher education institutions with robust or emerging OER programs to determine trends and best practices. Focus on capturing information about existing faculty grant incentive programs, levels of library support provided for selection and creation of OER, and available resources for building campus literacy around the open education movement. Data collected from this will provide a starting point to determine relevant approaches for institutional culture, areas to streamline processes, and spark conversations among the committee that will prove essential to establish appropriate resources and marketing. Determine easy entry-point resources that place emphasis on simplicity for the campus community. This motivation is to empower teaching faculty to engage with OER concepts on their own.

COOKING METHOD
Select one or two committee members to draft the grant call for proposals, grant application, and to curate supporting materials. Other members can provide input as drafts of materials are prepared. This division of labor will ensure momentum while utilizing the committee’s diverse expertise. Take the
time to reach out to librarians at other institutions doing this work to build a network and uncover specifics about grant processes that often require institutional access. Final resources to implement include:

1. **Call for proposals.** The call for proposals should explain OER as a free or low-cost alternative to a traditional print textbook for students and the benefit of open licensing to allow faculty to leverage their expertise to personalize student learning experiences. Invite motivated faculty interested in innovative engagement with their course materials to submit proposals intended to achieve one of the following:
   - Adoption of existing OER to replace the main textbook for a high enrollment course; awards up to $1,500
   - Adaptation of pre-existing OER, including local, updated, or ancillary materials; awards up to $1,500
   - Create and publish new OER from faculty-authored content; awards up to $3,000

2. **Grant application.** Investigate a variety of survey tools for the development of the application. Select a tool that already has its primary infrastructure within the library, such as LibWizard. Test survey tools for ease of searching submissions by field types as well as keywords, downloading submissions as a .csv file for adding notations, etc., and the capability to set the system to email submissions in entirety to a selected email, creating a back-up of records (to utilize as a double-check of applications). Essential application categories relate to applicant and course information. For creation projects, ask that applicants attach a budget to demonstrate their plan in addition to their short narrative. Narrative expectations are to outline implementation, address how the applicant’s proposal would impact the academic community, and share any concerns or challenges (like technology barriers).

   The application process needs to be efficient and manageable for all stakeholders. With this in mind, embed an acceptance of the memorandum of understanding terms within the grant application itself, such as requiring grant awardees to deposit any openly licensed content created in an institutional repository, write a final report, circulate a student survey, and participate in future OER learning events. Determine rolling application deadlines in fall and spring semesters based on textbook order deadlines and other demands on faculty time within the academic calendar.

3. **Grant proposal rubric.** Develop a rubric to guide the award selection that prioritizes proposals based on cost savings to students, impact to open education (how many students benefit), ability to succeed, and pedagogical innovation. The rubric will assist the committee in prioritizing funding support and addressing questions that arise from proposals.

4. **Web presence.** Establish a one-stop shopping location for all things OER, something anyone on the committee can update. This can be something as simple as utilizing the Springshare LibGuide platform. Adopt deliberate design choices to differentiate this guide from other library course guides and remove the idea of one expert on this topic. This enables the ability to house all relevant what, why, how, materials selected (see Additional Resources), embed the grant application, share learning events, and update frequently asked questions as these are learned on-the-fly.

5. **Marketing.** Brand the initiative early to build a consistent look across the library guide, social media posts, newsletters, emails, and handouts. This work can rely simply on a set logo and mirroring the language and content of the web presence throughout messaging put forth in marketing materials.

Committee goals for resources in place should be to answer basic questions related to OER, copyright, and the library alternative textbook grant process. To this end, seek teaching faculty feedback on draft documents to uncover tension points. This proves an excellent step in the cooking process. Once the above resources are in place, take the time for some final back-end work to activate open access resources and enhance discoverability of the initiative’s web presence within the library discovery layer. This allows all searches from the user community related to OER to point to the initiative’s web presence providing another point of entry. A grassroots production requires working with resources and tools already available, which prioritizes funding for faculty grants.
Prior to advertising and promoting an OER initiative, update library faculty and staff on plans to maintain their support. Such buy-in allows for seeking direct help from liaison librarians with deep knowledge of current courses and strong relationships with subject faculty and departments. This approach opens the door to asking liaison librarians to help market the initiative. Recruit these librarians to set up meetings with academic departments where to pitch the initiative. In nearly all cases, the lure of potential grant funds will open the door for librarians to be added to what is often an already packed departmental agenda.

Partners to help spread the word are important, but the most necessary step to promote an OER initiative is successfully scheduling face-to-face meetings with faculty and academic departments. For the entire first semester of the initiative, and at least a month prior, anticipate meeting with groups every two weeks (figure 1). In each case, tailor presentations to the specific group(s). This involves knowing what courses they teach, what texts they currently use, what their high-enrollment courses are, their subject specialties, and selecting relevant open textbook samples to demonstrate.

The makeup of these meetings can vary from an entire college to a group of science-based departments involved in broad STEM disciplines to individual departments. Schedule such meetings for an hour, if possible, in order to share and allow plenty of time for Q&A with faculty. Be aware that one-hour time slots are not always something academic departments are willing to sacrifice for their own departmental meetings. Approach this in one of two ways:

1. Set up a special meeting time that does not conflict with their departmental meeting and focus on sharing the incentive of small grants for faculty.
2. Ask for 10 minutes at their departmental meeting and keep it direct—an elevator pitch.

For option 2, take supporting material (figures 2 and 3) to distribute with basic information, contact details, and/or URLs that lead to additional information.
For the successful launch of an OER initiative, it is critical to have many stakeholders, internal and external to the library, onboard across your higher education institution. Consider the impact of different stakeholders, such as academic affairs, central administration, campus bookstores, library administration, and library faculty and staff. Seek collaborators who are motivated to contribute to positive work concerned with increasing student access and equity to resources to benefit both students and the institution. Motivated collaborators are at the heart of grassroots efforts, and the authors believe this approach lends in part to a successful initiative.

**ALLERGY WARNINGS**

**What’s open?**

Be prepared to discuss the difference between true open access content, content freely available on the web (potentially copyrighted), as well as licensed, leased, and purchased electronic content (electronic books, journals, etc.). There is a vast misunderstanding of these differences among teaching faculty. Transparency is crucial in communication about why some content does not meet the open, altruistic goals of an OER initiative. When needed, enlist the assistance of a collection development librarian or electronic resources librarian who frequently deals with vendor and publisher licensing to help consult on misunderstandings.

Relatedly, anticipate discussing the nuances of copyright versus Creative Commons licensing as they relate to OER materials. This is likely to be interwoven in any discussion about licensed/paywalled electronic content to which the libraries offer access. While librarians understand that licensed electronic content cannot be included in most OER materials without prior consent from copyright holders, this distinction is not as obvious if items are easily retrieved online from the teaching faculty’s perspective. One solution...
is to show faculty how to search for content licensed under various Creative Commons licenses on a number of platforms as well as going through the basics of copyright law. A risk in explaining copyright law is boredom—attention spans can quickly dissipate when discussing it in detail. Offset this by preparing discipline-specific examples. When encountering questions you do not have an immediate answer for, remain transparent and consider a follow-up time to look up copyright information. This step adds value through scenarios where the librarian and faculty learn together. A sample scenario:

**Question:** We want to offer a high-altitude cooking recipe in our OER and we have lots of examples of low-altitude versions. Can we just modify another recipe from a website?

**Answer:** It depends, but US copyright law has a section that deals with cooking recipes (United States Copyright Office, 2017, p. 2).

**Repository or website?**
Teaching faculty are often confused about the difference between a digital repository (or institutional repository) and a website. In some cases, they assume the libraries can build or help build a custom, web-based content application. This does not always align with the libraries’ goals to provide access to OER content while preserving it in a repository system. If this is not the case at your library, feel fortunate! For the majority of us, with minimal resources and dedicated positions for OER, be prepared to explain these differences. An open-door approach to review grant proposals and discuss them in advance with faculty to establish clear expectations is recommended. Faculty understand the limitations that campus organizations have in terms of capacity and infrastructure; a simple change to their web-delivery method often ensures a successful application without additional workload for the library.

**Where is the content?**
You will encounter grant recipients who may not be able to fulfill their end of the bargain (i.e., delivering the OER material). An awardee’s OER material may also disregard adherence to copyright rules. Determine ways to still incentivize faculty to apply for grants and develop materials while also ensuring library access to an actual end product. This could require periodic check-ins to serve as a reminder of both due dates and content requirements before a final deadline. For true non-compliance, consider making it a rule that applicants cannot apply for further funding until requirements of prior grants are met.

Realistically, this is something all OER initiatives will grapple with on some level.

**CHEF’S NOTES**

**Campus advocates**
When seeking out advocates on campus, think about who has direct contact with faculty in terms of textbooks (campus bookstores, in most cases). Although UW Libraries had previously worked with the campus bookstore to look at textbook saving measures, academic affairs shared OER plans on the libraries’ behalf. It was a pleasant surprise to learn they supported the project and that they had received multiple inquiries from faculty about open textbooks. They shared information about courses and faculty already using open textbooks. We also learned that the bookstore offered OpenStax texts, saw how these looked within their database, and discovered they wanted to include any open texts that were created via the OER initiative in their platform—a powerful way to remain transparent with students about free or low-cost options.

In addition to official campus organizations, consider making contacts with the students themselves. UW publicized efforts directly to student organizations, which early on led one graduate student organization to advocate to their own faculty (Astronomy and Physics departments in this case) to learn more about the OER initiative. This led to a meeting not only with students but also with faculty in those departments.

**Cost savings impact**
In the midst of background research, the committee recognized they had no sense of actual cost savings that could be realized by implementing OER at UW. Communication with administrators helped guide targeting departments with significant high-enrollment courses. This combined with data from the Research and Instruction department resulted in a detailed list of high-enrollment...
courses. A list in-hand was merely the beginning, and the full process of uncovering enough information to project savings of the switch to OER required searching for these courses in the online registration tool as well as in the campus store textbook database.

**Potential Savings to UW Students, Fall 2017**

- ACCT 1010, Student Capacity 315, $70,000+
- ECON 1010, Student Capacity 450, $90,000+
- CHEM 1020, Student Capacity 760, $90,000+
- LIFE 1010, Student Capacity 566, $100,000+
- POLS 1000, Student Capacity 452, $100,000+

**Figure 4. Select projected student cost savings.**

Embedded with courtesy of UW Libraries

Projections for high-enrollment courses were based on the following assumptions: that OER in some form fully replaced the text, that courses received full student enrollment, and that the students were purchasing the “new” cost version of the text. The cost of textbooks, even within the campus store platform, ranged from used, new, to varied costs from popular retail locations. Selecting one price-point allowed for consistent calculations across all the courses we were evaluating in this way. It is worth noting that transparency remained about these assumptions in our calculations as results were shared with relevant stakeholders, though numbers bore out the financial impact (figure 4) of starting this initiative on the student body at an unanticipated potential cost savings. Primarily, the committee wanted to improve its understanding of cost savings, but in the end, having these numbers aligned with high-enrollment courses helped promote and provide proof-of-concept for the initiative with teaching faculty along with strengthening buy-in with library and campus administration.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**Ingredients**


**Resources**

- Creative Commons. (n.d.). Share your work. Retrieved from https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/

University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. (2020). Open educational resources. Retrieved from https://www.library.umass.edu/oer/


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