Kristi Jensen and Quill West

Open educational resources and the higher education environment

A leadership opportunity for libraries

Two speakers from the SPARC-ACRL Forum at the 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting, Kristi Jensen and Quill West, have graciously agreed to share their insights into open educational resources (OER) in this month's column. They approach this topic from different perspectives and assert that libraries can play a pivotal role in transforming teaching and learning by supporting the adoption of OER.

Quill West: Community colleges and OER

Every community college that I've worked with, for, and around for the past ten years has referenced diversity, access, and goal attainment in its institutional mission statements.

As a librarian working for equal access institutions, I have dedicated my professional life to the idea that every person can use education as a tool to better her life and take her place as a responsible citizen of our world.

Benefits of open education
Open education is a philosophy, a pedagogical shift, and a movement that works to improve educational experiences through adopting learning materials that aren't locked down by restrictive copyright laws. In a lot of ways open education is about saving students money on textbooks, which helps institutions to meet equity of access missions. However, open education is also about increasing student achievement, inspiring passion among faculty, and building better connections between students and the materials that they use to meet their educational goals.

As Marshall Smith and Catherine Casserly note, "At the heart of the open educational resources movement is the simple and powerful idea that the world's knowledge is a public good and that technology in general and the World Wide Web in particular provide an extraordinary opportunity for everyone to share, use, and reuse that knowledge."[1] The open education movement is a sharing movement, and it speaks to libraries because, at its core, the basic concept is that the more materials are shared, the more the world is bettered.

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OER defined

As defined by David Wiley, OER are materials with which an individual can exercise five rights. Known as the five Rs, they are: retain, revise, remix, redistribute, and reuse.[2] The five Rs are possible when materials are in the public domain or are made available with an open licensing tool such as a Creative Commons license.

When teaching with OER, an educator can exercise freedoms that aren't possible with regular copyrighted materials. Imagine a classroom where the teacher can make up-to-the-minute changes to materials that aren't supportive of the learning experience. In the same class, an instructor can ask students to find, evaluate, and update OER that can be used in future courses because OER can be remixed and reused. When openly licensed materials are used, the benefits of changing and growing learning resources in real-time and as-needed are realized. Making use of OER is a way that institutions can help control student costs, but even more powerful are the new pedagogical and reflective practices that result from adopting open education as an educational philosophy.

How libraries can support OER adoption

Starting in 2013, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (WA SBCTC) studied faculty use of OER in 34 community and technical colleges. The report of the qualitative study notes that faculty adopt OER for a variety of reasons related to cost, the ability to adapt materials, greater possibilities in collaboration, diversity of resources, convenience, and reflection on their teaching. However, the same study notes that faculty who successfully adopted OER needed institutional support in their adoption efforts. In particular, faculty expressed a need for supporters in policy, help in finding quality materials, and professional development around copyright, open licensing, and integrated course design. This is a role that librarians can—and have—filled. The WA SBCTC study notes that, "In several Washington colleges librarians have become the OER experts on campus. They have served as OER advocates, offering college-wide workshops and consultation to assist faculty in identifying OER in their disciplines. While librarians' roles in OER adoption vary from campus to campus, many faculty viewed them as potential OER leaders on campus."[3]

There is a clear need for institutional-level leadership in the adoption of OER as a strategy for improving access and student achievement at our institutions. Librarians can fill this role, and in some cases already have. The main question for most libraries is how to get started as OER leaders.

Support for becoming OER leaders

The first step to becoming an OER leader is to become familiar with the resources and organizations available to help grow knowledge and experience. For example, SPARC has an OER initiative that provides professional development, outreach, and support for talking points.[4] The Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources, a partner of the Open Education Consortium, holds regular webinars on issues and projects related to open education.[5] For background information, and to access a literature review on OER research, visit The Review Project.[6] There are many organizations and colleagues that can help libraries as they begin their open education research.

As you explore your position on open education, remember that open education is an opportunity for librarians and libraries to lead institutional change by connecting people and resources in the most effective ways possible.

Kristi Jensen: OER leadership at large research universities

OER have been available for more than a decade. Despite an abundance of resources on a wide range of topics, usage of them has not risen to an extensive level. However, numerous issues have impacted higher

education over the past several years and the intersection of them creates a climate amenable to discussing and adopting OER. Some of these widely covered issues include decreased funding for public higher education and rising tuition costs; rapidly rising student loan debt; new ways of thinking about teaching and learning, including MOOCs and the flipped classroom; and state and federal legislation related to OER. New pressures on institutions brought about by these issues mean that many faculty have begun to think about teaching and learning in the classroom in new ways. More faculty are also developing an awareness of, and concern about, the impact of the increased cost of higher education for their students and the impact of high textbook costs on students' academic success. These new pressures and shifting faculty perspectives set the stage for increased education and advocacy around OER. But the question remains on many campuses: Who is responsible for, or best positioned to, carry out education and advocacy to support the adoption of OER?

Several articles on faculty attitudes and behaviors related to OER[7,8,9,10] point to multiple opportunities to provide support and leadership related to OER advocacy on campus. The results of these studies were further supported by the recent Babson OER survey[11] that discusses faculty awareness of and attitudes toward OER. The Babson report indicates that only about 20% of faculty are aware (very aware and aware) of OER, leaving a huge gap that could be viewed as problematic, considering how long OERs have existed. Commentary on this finding has varied, but David Wiley indicates in a recent blog post: "These awareness findings are bad news for OER advocates because it means there is still a huge window for traditional publishers to organize a massive FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt) campaign against OER."[12]

Given low awareness of OER and the need to counter the message that the traditional textbook model is the only good option for faculty, prime opportunity space exists for education, advocacy, and the mobilization of OER textbook representatives. Libraries have been educating about the concept of "open" for years. Developing a robust understanding of faculty, administrative, and student concerns and issues related to OER, creating targeted messages based on the stakeholder group, and reaching out to educate about and advocate for OER are complementary to our existing efforts focused on open scholarship and data. The Babson report discusses several deterrents to faculty use of OER, including difficulty finding what they need and not understanding if/how they can use the materials. Librarians have helped faculty locate materials for years, and developing the ability to effectively search for quality OER fits well with our skills and expertise. Given our work with open licenses in other settings, assisting with understanding the meaning of open licenses for real life practice is a good fit, as well.

Many libraries have become involved in OER efforts on their campuses. The University of Minnesota, for instance, has threaded support for OER through our eLearning Support Initiative:

• working with Digital Course Packs to provide access to a wide array of learning materials including OER,[13]

• new opportunities to advocate OER as a result of the development of a Coordinated Service Model on campus to streamline support for teaching and learning through highly collaborative work with campus partners,

• partnerships related to the Open Textbook Library[14] and the Open Textbook Network,[15] and

• an upcoming faculty incentive program, the Partnership for Affordable Content,[16] to explore alternative course materials to save students money and enhance the teaching and learning experience.

More widespread library involvement with OER has led to the development of resources that help support others consider-

ing such efforts. The recent ACRL/SPARC Institute on OER at the 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting brought together resources[17] and expertise on OER and libraries that will be valuable to many others, as well. The SPARC Libraries and OER Forum[18] provides an email list to share OER activities at your library and to ask others questions about their OER experiences, as well as a monthly phone call for more direct information sharing and the chance to express priority areas for collaborative development. Individual libraries have also created useful guides related to OER, as well.

Libraries are poised to act as key players supporting the adoption of OER within higher education. We understand issues related to open (including open scholarship and open data), have the vision to see the needs and opportunities related to OER at our institutions, often have strong working relationships with campus partners to further this work, and have the patience to execute both short- and long-term goals that will expand the reach of OER. We all have the opportunity to inspire colleagues to engage around OER in 2015 and beyond.

Notes

1. Marshall Smith and Catherine Casserly, "The Promise of Open Educational Resources," *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning* 38, no. 5 (2006): 8-17, www.icde. org/filestore/Resources/Taskforce_on_OER /PaperOERSmithCasserlyHF.pdf.

2. David Wiley, "Defining the "Open" in Open Content," *Open Content.* Accessed February 4, 2015, http://opencontent.org /definition/.

3. Boyoung Chae and Mark Jenkins, *Qualitative Investigation of Faculty Open Educational Resource Usage in the Washington Community and Technical College System: Models for Support and Implementation,* Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, January 1, 2015. Accessed February 4, 2015, http://goo.gl/dERBtX.

4. SPARC Open Educational Resources page: www.sparc.arl.org/theme/open -educational-resources.

5. Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources: http://oerconsortium. org/.

6. The Open Education Group Review Project: http://openedgroup.org/review.

7. Diane Harley, et al., "Affordable and open textbooks: an exploratory study of faculty attitudes," *California Journal of Politics and Policy,* 2 no. 1 2010: 1-34.

8. Ross Charles McKerlich, Cindy Ives, and Rory McGreal, "Measuring use and creation of open educational resources in higher education," *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning,* 14 no. 4 (2013): 91–102.

9. Peter Reed, "Awareness, attitudes and participation of teaching staff towards the open content movement in one university," *Research in Learning Technology,* 20 (2012): 1–14.

10. Vivien Rolfe, "Open educational resources: staff attitudes and awareness," *Research in Learning Technology,* 20 (2012): 1–13.

11. I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, "Opening the Curriculum: Open Educational Resources in U.S. Higher Education," Babson Survey Research Group, October 2014, www. onlinelearningsurvey.com/oer.html.

12. David Wiley, "The Babson OER survey and the future of OER adoption," *Iterating Toward Openness,* November 3, 2014, http:// opencontent.org/blog/archives/3619.

13. Digital Course Pack Project at the University of Minnesota: https://www.lib.umn. edu/services/dcp.

14. Open Textbook Library: http://open. umn.edu/opentextbooks/.

15. Open Textbook Network: http://z. umn.edu/opentextbooks.

16. Partnership for Affordable Content at the University of Minnesota: https://www.lib. umn.edu/elearning/partnership.

17. OER Institute Resources: www. sparc.arl.org/events/tackling-textbook-costs -through-open-educational-resources-primer .

18. SPARC Libraries and OER Forum: www.sparc.arl.org/resource/sparc-libraries -oer-forum. ✍