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Getting up to Speed on OER: Advice from a Newbie

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AMY STANFORTH is a Research & Instruction Librarian at Portland State University. She works with general education faculty and students and is a member of the OER Working Group at PSU. She got her start in libraries as a student worker at Florida State University and just couldn't get enough. In her free time Amy enjoys traveling, knitting, petting her doggies, and playing bass guitar.

Open Educational Resources (OER) programs are growing and institutions are looking for leaders to steer these programs successfully. This article will give advice to folks who are tasked with starting an OER program or joining an established program in its growth stage. It will discuss where to find OER research for those who don't know much about it, such as LibGuides, pertinent journals, and OER repositories. Then, it will move onto building campus partnerships and finding like-minded people in your institution that can champion the cause and help grow the program as well as provide institutional support. Next, it will look at off-campus partnerships and working with outside stakeholders that share the same goals. Lastly, the article will give advice for keeping current on OER research and resources, and discuss some of the professional development opportunities available.

Introduction

Open Educational Resources (OER) programs are growing around the world. As students struggle to meet the financial demands of higher education, institutions are recognizing that OER is an important component of the affordability of college and equalizing access to learning materials. Institutions are looking for leaders to steer these efforts and successfully implement sustainable OER programs on campuses. In some instances, librarians are assigned this new role and are tasked with getting up to speed on OER. This article gives advice and resources to those new to the role. A resource list is provided at the end of the article for your convenience.

Do Your Research

Like any good librarian, you'll start your journey into OER by doing some research. Start by looking at a variety of LibGuides from different types of institutions. You will notice the same repositories mentioned on the various guides, such as Merlot and OER Commons to name a few. There are hundreds of OER repositories across the world, making it impossible to list all of them, but you should explore some of the most well-known ones to get a feel for how they work, the features and filters provided, and the content within. Choose a few high enrollment subject areas at your institution and conduct searches to mimic the faculty experience. LibGuides will also give insight into what other institutions are doing to grow



and promote their programs on campus, including resources such as program descriptions with creative commons licenses. Instead of starting from scratch, build upon existing models and customize them to fit the needs of your campus.

OER is an area of growing scholarly research. The administration will want to see scholarly published studies on the efficacy of OER on affordability, retention, and academic achievement. Luckily, there are a few groups collecting this type of research in one place. The Review Project from the Open Education Group provides summaries of all known empirical research on the impacts of OER adoption. OERHub's Research & Outputs page contains academic publications and presentations from their own projects.

Building Campus Partnerships

Your best allies are those you share a campus with. Reaching out to various groups will give a holistic approach to the program. OER champions can be found in faculty across disciplines and these folks are your best allies. The biggest influence on faculty adoption of OER is other faculty who have done it and can serve as testimony to the benefits and speak honestly about the challenges. A search in the course catalog using the no-cost/low-cost designation, as required by Oregon House Bill 2871, is a good starting place for finding like-minded faculty.

Campus instructional support services and student government offer additional unique opportunities for partnerships. Instructional support services, sometimes called "The Center for Teaching and Learning" or "Office of Academic Innovation," work directly with faculty to design courses. They can encourage the adoption of OER and the integration of open education into teaching and learning practices. The marketing and public relations offices will have ideas to contribute for solidifying messages and promoting initiatives both on and off campus. Also, consider working with your college bookstore. The bookstore can provide print copies of OER for students and help track textbook data. Other institutional partners include your campus advisors, as they work directly with students and help them select classes that best meet their needs. Directing students to courses that offer a no or low-textbook cost option is significant for many of our budget-constrained students. When you're ready to dig deeper into data for assessment purposes, of course, your Institutional Research department is another ally in supporting your OER efforts.

Students are the biggest stakeholders in the textbook affordability movement and will be eager to get involved in promoting OER on campus. Invite them to attend planning meetings and then listen to their perspectives on how and why OER benefits them. Help them craft a positive message to faculty that reaches beyond the cost benefits of OER and touches on what faculty cares about most: access, retention, and academic achievement. There are a few toolkits aimed specifically at students, such as the PIRG toolkit and the Open Oregon Educational Resources toolkit. The biggest challenge to working with students is maintaining momentum as students graduate.

Off Campus Partnerships

Open Oregon Educational Resources offers local support to librarians and faculty creating and promoting OER in Oregon. The Open Oregon Educational Resources website contains a resource page listing OER adoption at various Oregon institutions as well as OER authored by Oregon instructors. Open Oregon Educational Resources delivers workshops



and trainings throughout the year and provides scholarships and funding opportunities for attendees. New to their website is a choose-your-own-adventure style FAQ with pathways of helpful information for the questions that faculty frequently ask. Most importantly, Open Oregon Educational Resources is a place to identify the growing Oregon OER support network and to make connections with other like-minded folks across the state. Join the listserv to stay informed of grant opportunities and workshops, and to learn more about your colleagues and the work they are doing.

OER champions all over the world are eager to share what they've done, and in true Open ethos, they make their work available to others with Creative Commons licensing. Consider these as additional off-campus partners. As mentioned above, building on existing models and customizing those models to fit your needs is a timesaving strategy. LibGuides contain many examples of program descriptions, process flowcharts, grant applications, and promotion ideas. Larger textbook initiatives offer additional support, such as OpenStax webinars and the Lumen Learning OER Champions Playbook, which lay out actionable items to incorporate into your campus action plan. Sparc and Open Textbook Network are two additional organizations that come to mind when considering additional support from off campus. Sparc especially does great work in supporting new-to-OER librarians by offering fellowships and professional development opportunities.

Keeping Current

Now that you've gotten up to speed on the current state of OER, relax into the idea that OER is changing and growing all the time. New materials are released, new tools are created, and new research is published. It can be overwhelming to keep up! Your best bet is to join listservs where you can learn about newly released or updated materials, learn about new tools and repositories, and keep current on research and professional development opportunities. Listservs also provide a platform for getting answers to questions you didn't even know you had. Members are quick to respond with best practices and to share their experiences and the lessons they've learned.

Attending local, state, and national conferences goes a long way toward keeping current. Open Oregon Educational Resources provides a few conference and training opportunities a year and offers scholarships and funding to attend. Academic librarian conferences typically host a few workshops on the topic. However, if attending conferences in person isn't an option, seek out conference reports and look to YouTube for recordings of keynote speakers and workshops. Webinars are another popular in-person conference substitute. Attend live, or watch a recording with your OER group at your convenience.

Open Educational Resources is an area that is growing rapidly. This growth can make it overwhelming for those new to the topic to find their footing and maintain a strategy for keeping up to date. The suggestions in this article and the accompanying resource list offer ways for librarians new to OER to advance and grow their current understanding. 



Resources

An electronic version of this resource list is available at <https://goo.gl/kyYMZM>

OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES REPOSITORIES

MERLOT

<https://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>

OER Commons

<https://www.oercommons.org/>

OASIS

<https://oasis.geneseo.edu/index.php>

RESEARCH REPOSITORIES

The Review Project from Open Education Group

<http://openedgroup.org/review>

OERHub Research & Outputs Page

<http://oerhub.net/research-outputs/>

FOR LIBRARIANS AND FACULTY

Open Oregon Educational Resources

<https://openoregon.org/>

Open Stax Webinars

<https://openstax.org/blog/upcoming-openstax-webinars>

Lumen Learning OER Champions Playbook

<https://lumenlearning.com/champion-playbook/>

Sparc Popular Resources

<https://sparcopen.org/what-we-do/popular-resources/>

FOR STUDENTS

PIRG Toolkit

<https://studentpirgs.org/campaigns/sp/make-textbooks-affordable>

Open Oregon Educational Resources Student Toolkit

<https://openoregon.org/student-toolkit/>

SUGGESTED LISTSERVS

LibOER

<https://sparcopen.org/our-work/sparc-library-oer-forum/>

Open Oregon Educational Resources

<https://openoregon.org/email-group-launches/>

Open Textbook Network

<https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/contact>

