

How We Learned to Relax and Encouraged Others to Embrace OER

Janet Baltes¹

Travis Mann²

Emily Moran³

Stephanie Warden⁴

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Introduction

The University of Wisconsin – Superior has roughly 2,500 students, 46% of whom are first-generation students. A large portion of our student population is from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds, and, based on results from a survey regarding the affordability of textbooks, most respondents purchase their course materials from their own funds. These reasons, as well as many others, have caused our library, the Jim Dan Hill Library, to encourage the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) on our campus.

In the spring of 2020, the Jim Dan Hill Library within the Markwood Center for Learning, Innovation and Collaboration (CLIC) created a committee to work with OER on campus. The OER committee was comprised of two librarians, one instructional designer, and one student. The committee first investigated OER programs from other colleges and universities of similar size and

solicited advice from such programs. This involved cold-contacting roughly thirty campuses and asking them a few questions by email. Some of those campuses offered to speak further over the phone or video calls about their past programming. In addition, members of the committee performed literature reviews regarding the benefits of OER usage. We began planning how to take what we learned from the other campuses and tailored it to our campus. This included an OER Mini-Grant program, OER workshops, and programming for Open Education Week.

By the spring of 2021, the makeup of the committee changed and is now comprised of four librarians. Janet Baltes has worked at the University for thirty-eight years and is currently the library's Cataloger. Prior to serving on the committee, Janet had little experience with OER. Travis Mann, the Systems Librarian, has worked at the University for three years and previously

¹ *Cataloger, University of Wisconsin - Superior, Superior, WI, United States;* ²*Systems and Digital Services Librarian, University of Wisconsin - Superior, Superior, WI, United States;* ³ *Instructional Design Librarian, University of Wisconsin - Superior, Superior, WI, United States;*

⁴*Associate Director and Information Literacy Librarian Institution, University of Wisconsin - Superior, Superior, WI, United States*
E-mail: tmann5@uwsuper.edu

worked in secondary education and volunteered at the Wauwatosa Historical Society. Serving on this committee is Travis' first foray into the realm of OER, and he has earned both the Creative Commons Certificate and the Certificate in OER Librarianship. Emily Moran is the Instructional Design Librarian and has worked at the University for two years. She had some experience promoting OER at her previous employer and had earned the Creative Commons Certificate by the time she started working on this committee. Finally, Stephanie Warden is the Associate Director and Information Literacy Librarian and has been working at the University for seven years. She has previous experience in a medical library, an agricultural information center, and libraries in for-profit schools. Prior to serving on this committee, she served on other textbook affordability committees and has also earned the Creative Commons Certificate.

OER Mini-Grants

In the spring of 2021, the OER committee took it upon itself to create, from scratch, an OER grant program for our campus. We began accepting proposals from campus faculty and staff in September of 2021 for a round of grant funding for OER creation and adoption. This project, supported by a windfall from cost savings from supplies during COVID, allowed us to award two \$1,000 OER creation grants and two \$600 OER adoption grants.

This was the first time, to our knowledge, this kind of support for OER had been offered on our campus. We wanted to promote OER as well as give the impression that this is a serious undertaking and acknowledge the amount of effort the instructors would expend, and, as such, compensation would be part of a larger support system. To reinforce OER as legitimate course materials which are comparable to traditional textbooks, as well as maintain quality control, we

created a program requiring participants to meet with us and discuss the creation/adoption process. Instructors were required to submit proposals describing their project in detail and outline when and how it would be deployed in classes for us to score based on a rubric designed by our committee.

The rubric, which was included in the call for proposals, was created specifically to foster concepts such as equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. We prioritized projects which would impact the largest number of students, specifically general education courses, though we did accept some upper-level courses from the pool of applications. Once accepted, they were required to sign a nine-month-long stipend contract that stipulated they would meet with the committee three times during the work period, participate in an event in which they share their experiences with the community, and provide us with a copy of their syllabus showing the use of the new material.

After the awards were given, the committee's workload regarding the mini-grants decreased significantly for a time. While we made it clear that each of us was available to speak about open materials or answer any questions they may have, few people reached out for that kind of guidance. This was, at first, somewhat concerning as we had not had our first meeting post-contract at that point. However, our fears were unfounded, as we soon saw marvelous things coming from the participants. One of the participants coordinated with an instructor at another institution who they met through a previous OER program, our Virtual Intensive, to use Pressbooks to create a new textbook for her upper-level social work students. Another began creating a music textbook using openly licensed materials from YouTube which included a diverse array of styles, composers, and artists. This instructor also made use of non-open materials with explicit permission from the creators. Yet another instructor adopted a new

OER for use in an introductory English as a Second Language (ESL) course which will be used not only by them, but also by others hired to teach the course.

As a result of this program, we anticipate material costs will be decreased by between \$55.00 and \$160.00 per student per course, totaling roughly \$7,560.00 between all four instructors. In addition to creating equity through cost savings, several of the instructors have also made concentrated efforts to actively seek images and artifacts which are representative of a wider range of students and student experiences. For example, one recipient has been very mindful of including musical compositions by composers from underrepresented populations throughout musical history.

During our debrief sessions with faculty, many noted that the project was transformative for their teaching. Some noted they felt more confident that the material suited the class, and others stated they were able to actively engage students with the material more easily as content reviewers. While the experiences reported were very positive overall, participants also had some ideas for improvements, including proofreading services and technology mentors. This is not a service we currently offer; however, we are investigating creating a student position which may aid with this portion of the work.

While we found this to be a worthy project, and the benefits exceeded our meager expectations, we admit it was a large undertaking. Indeed, the committee was comprised of volunteers from the library staff, including our cataloger, instructional design librarian, systems librarian, and information literacy librarian, all of whom have duties and responsibilities that do not include OER. In addition to planning and executing the program, the committee took full responsibility for the marketing and promotion of the project to constituents, as well as the contract and payment

logistics. To this end, we learned a great deal about how the UW-Superior campus works in terms of getting and distributing funding. We also gained experience with multiple publishing tools, including OER Commons and Pressbooks.

OER Virtual Intensive

Additionally, in the fall of 2021, our library joined the Open Education Network (OEN) in a bid to increase awareness of and access to educational resources for faculty and staff. Our membership included access to slides which greatly aided us in our development of a curriculum for a one-day intensive workshop that culminated in participants submitting their review of an OER in their discipline to the Open Textbook Library. Participants were awarded small stipends to incentivize participation.

The lecture portion of the program consisted of six sessions held virtually over the course of one day. Topics included Why OER?; Library Resources; The Five Rs/Creative Commons Licenses; Finding and Evaluating OER; Adopting and Adapting OER; and Creation, Accessibility, and Sharing. We also covered the standards and rubric for reviews to be submitted to the Open Textbook Library. Participants were expected to attend the full day of workshops prior to submitting their review and also attend a closing session after submitting their work.

Participants largely agreed that the experience was beneficial. All enjoyed seeing their work acknowledged with payment. Some went on to contact the authors of the books they reviewed and forged new and lasting relationships with those authors, resulting in at least one collaboration. Some indicated interacting with OER gave them a better idea of what OER were and increased their confidence working with them. In addition, it gave them an opportunity to interact with a peer-reviewed text and become a peer-reviewer

themselves. Many reported better relationships with the library and an increased awareness of who to contact if they have questions about OER.

It was noted that some of the information contained in the presentations was repetitive for those who had participated in other OER related programming. This is something we will address when we host the program again this year by allowing participants to choose the sessions they wish to attend. We also gained a great deal of experience working with the OEN, which was entirely new to us. While we were developing the program, the workload of taking the information from the OEN and tailoring it to our campus's needs was quite large. Now, we have a better grasp of what we are doing and have the materials developed, and we are confident the next iteration will go smoothly and will not take as much of our time to implement and prepare.

Superior Learning Experience

Over the course of summer of 2021, we had five instructors participate in a five-week cohort-based learning experience to identify relevant OER and adopt it in a course. This program was co-facilitated by a librarian and an instructor who had experience adopting an open textbook. During the program, participants learned about Creative Commons Licenses, where to find OER, and how to integrate open resources into their courses. Participants regularly checked in with the facilitators and received one-on-one support and advice. The program culminated in a peer-review of their courses in our learning management system, and participants were paid via contract for their work.

Instructors who participated indicated they learned what OER were and how to find them. Instructors once more indicated they appreciated being compensated for their time and work above and beyond what they would be able to commit to during the school year. Many instructors who

participated in the program also elected to participate in our other OER-centered programs, such as the mini-grant and virtual intensive.

While most participants discovered truly open resources, some did not take all the lessons to heart. A particularly frustrating example came from an instructor who found a resource via the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) that did not have an appropriate CC License, though they elected to use the resource anyway. As a result, we decided to change the way we discuss open resource aggregators and be more careful emphasizing personal responsibility to find appropriate licensing.

As a result, we gained more experience teaching OER discovery and evaluation skills. We also identified a group of instructors who are eager to learn more about and work with OER. These instructors in turn have created a community, frequently attending and supporting our OER events at the library. Additionally, this program was particularly impactful for students. We estimate three percent of our student population benefited from the participants' use of OER during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Open Education Week 2022

We hosted several events during Open Education Week in March of 2022, including tabling sessions in the student union, where we gathered information from students about the cost of their textbooks; an OER trivia game for students hosted on Kahoot; and an OER panel directed at instructors, where we invited three instructors to discuss their use of OER.

In collaboration with our Student Involvement Office, we incentivized students to attend our OER Kahoot trivia event by offering gift cards for participants. The event was geared toward students looking to learn more about OER. The questions

we asked were primarily based upon campus-specific information from the Financial Aid Office's data about textbook costs, the vocabulary and acronyms associated with open resources, and statistics involving textbook costs. Since the questions were all multiple choice, we tried to make the incorrect answers obvious so we could use it as an educational opportunity for students. Most participants indicated they learned something new about open resources. Even with the incentives, the event was sparsely attended, probably due in no small part to the lack of knowledge surrounding the subject on campus and perhaps also due to challenges marketing the event.

Another event that week was a lunch at the student union. We invited students to write how much money they spent on textbooks for the Spring 2022 semester on a whiteboard, briefly mentioned the benefits of their instructors using OER in their courses, and offered educational materials about OER, as well as bribed them with candy. With over 40 students participating, we consider the event a success. Beyond the members of the committee participating, we also had a student from the CLIC Advisory Committee volunteer their time and support. This event served as an opportunity to inform students about open resources, while collecting useful data about how much money students spend on textbooks each semester. Many students were enthusiastic about the idea of reducing the price of textbooks, and some indicated they would talk to their instructors about OER.

The OER panel hosted later in the week seemed to be particularly impactful to the instructors who attended. The panelists consisted of three instructors who were actively using OER in their courses. In-person attendees consisted primarily of instructors across multiple departments. We recorded 33 viewers who watched the event via livestream on our library's YouTube channel,

although we could not determine their demographics. Audience members asked several thoughtful questions and voiced some of their fears and misconceptions about OER, which resulted in a meaningful conversation between the panelists and the audience. This included a question regarding vetting of information in OER compared to traditional textbooks, in which the panelist pointed out that mistakes occur in traditionally published textbooks in part due to a limited number of people proofreading and editing the materials, whereas in an OER, particularly a widely adopted OER, a mistake will likely be quickly corrected due to the number of people viewing the material with a critical eye.

These events were, for lack of a better term, invigorating for us. We considered all three to be successes. They generated buzz, created new partnerships, and connected us with students in a way we simply had not been before. We were also able to see how the events connected to and fed off each other. For example, one of the questions we were asked at our tabling event was about the OER panel at which a student's instructor was speaking. It illustrated for us the important nature of sustainable and consistent programming in promoting OER. Yet the workload to create, coordinate, and execute these events was substantial. The time commitment from each person on the committee cut into time which would have normally been spent executing regular duties.

Conclusion

Since the conclusion of the 2021-2022 school year, there has been more talk about OER on our campus, which we believe is due in no small part to our ongoing efforts. Through our programming, we have created various OER allies and, in the future, are planning on continuing the same programs. Participation on campus has already assured us that our efforts have been, and will

continue to be, successful. It is evident that since we have already undertaken these programs, the underlying workload involved with them will decrease while awareness and use of OER on campus will increase. Though it was a massive investment of our time and effort up-front, it does appear our efforts have largely been worthwhile.

Some of our next goals are to expand the mini-grants to include a departmental grant in addition to the individual adoption and creation grants, modify the OER Intensive based on feedback from previous participants, and better insert OER into the campus consciousness.

OER Panel Recording:

<https://youtu.be/3RW6q6X-5i8>

OER Virtual Intensive Slide Decks:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wEWy0LBzZ0N88cTn0UURTT4AImkjchDy?usp=sharing>

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Appendix

Mini-Grant Application:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iBt6SuawG7yPl-2s6fZNRcV_jE0-_7p3/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=117325636369572229274&rtpof=true&sd=true

Mini-Grant Rubric:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MQqL9UkW8DrVkkciyfaqbu9ZPJErMUb/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=117325636369572229274&rtpof=true&sd=true>