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Momentum Building: Progress Towards a National OER Movement

Nicole Allen, Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resource Coalition
Steven J Bell, Temple University
Marilyn S Billings, University of Massachusetts - Amherst

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and linking cost-effective course content with student success, including initiatives from Lumen Learning (http://lumenlearning.com/) and Robinson et al., librarians may be able to create assessment programs for our collections that directly impact curricular goals. Building library assessment around courses, such as explicitly serving the needs of specific courses, can be a measure of how we serve the community. E-textbooks could be the gateway to more direct support of library collections as part of the curriculum. Perhaps we would not need to be as concerned with storing multiple editions of the same text, which can take up feet of space on our shelves, and could thus be more involved in ensuring easy access to affordable print-on-demand and electronic resources.

In a similar vein, what if librarians should facilitate access to course content that results from the course itself, i.e., student outputs from their course experience? How would students learn from and experience content generated by their peers over the evolution of the course? Utilizing institutional repositories as content hubs, as they already are, for these types of collections, is complementary in nature to open educational resources and demonstrates how the library plays a role in all areas of student learning.

Of course, there are tradeoffs. Finding that sweet spot of balancing the information needs of current courses with long-term library collection goals to continue to serve our community is likely to be very complex. Libraries should not aim to create a comprehensive textbook collection of every textbook used for every course but should instead discern where the budget allocation will have the most significant impact on student learning outcomes and other aspects of student success. Textbooks are certainly having their moment in the spotlight with regards to the cost burden on students, and libraries can definitely play a greater role to alleviate that burden. Increasing discoverability of course content, promoting faculty adoption of affordable resources of high quality, and best serving the teaching and learning needs of our campuses are all key areas where librarians can take a greater role.

References


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by Nicole Allen (Director of Open Education, SPARC, 21 Dupont Circle NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036; Phone: 202-750-1637) <nicole@sparcopen.org> http://www.sparcopen.org

and Steven J. Bell (Associate University Librarian, Temple University, 1210 Polett Walk Temple University, Phila, PA 19122; Phone: 215-204-5023) <bells@temple.edu> http://stevenbell.info

and Marilyn Billings (Scholarly Communication & Special Initiatives Librarian, University of Massachusetts Amherst, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, 154 Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003; Phone: 413-545-6891; Fax: 413-545-6872) <mbillings@library.umass.edu> https://works.bepress.com/marilyn_billings/

Two years ago we were privileged to share our individual and collective experience with Open Education Resources (OER) with ATG readers. We also shared a vision inspired by our observation of a movement in which a growing number of academic and K-12 librarians were choosing to advocate for the adoption of affordable learning materials at their institutions.

Similar to the advances made towards the growing acceptance of open access publishing options and data sharing, educators are slowly gaining awareness of OER as learning materials. OER include open textbooks, open courseware, and other educational materials that carry an open license permitting their free use and repurposing by others. Although a recent Babson Survey showed only about a quarter of U.S. faculty are familiar with OER, we believe this will change as the power of academic librarians to support and increase faculty adoption of OER continues to grow into a national movement.

Our thinking that progress is achieved in greater numbers and with the power of collaboration is being put into practice with growing numbers of textbook affordability projects. For example, we recently joined dozens of colleagues from across the nation at the Open Textbook Network Summit to discuss, plan, and strategize for better ways to promote open textbook adoptions at our institutions, how to help faculty publish or modify open textbooks, and most importantly, what we can do to share and customize our own content for communicating the value of OER.

In this update to our original article we share those most recent developments, which to our way of thinking generate high enthusiasm for even greater progress towards higher education’s transition to a culture of openness.

Five Signs of Progress

1) OER Librarians: Ove the past two years, it has become increasingly clear that OER have a place within the modern academic library. It is now common for libraries to have at least one member of staff who is considered the OER point person, whether that person is officially designated or simply someone who has taken an interest in the topic. Campuses are frequently adding OER to job titles and descriptions and seeking candidates with OER experience. In many cases, OER is housed within scholarly communications, taking advantage of the natural connections with Open Access. However, OER initiatives are also housed within access services, technical services, collections development, digital initiatives, or departmental liaisons — all of which intersect with OER in one way or another. As this space matures, it will be interesting to see whether a role for an “OER librarian” becomes fixed, the way it did for scholarly communications, or if OER simply becomes part of what the entire library does.

2) Open Textbook Publishing: Among the most positive indicators is the continuing growth of open textbooks and the number of organizations supporting their publication. While the exact number of open textbooks is uncertain, continued on page 16

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known, as new books become available regularly, the Open Textbook Library has identified more than 260 titles from a variety of sources, many of which have been reviewed by faculty. Leading the charge is the Open Textbook Network (OTN), which is an alliance of nearly 250 colleges and universities across the country. The Open Textbook Network’s growth in the last two years is nothing short of astounding and speaks volumes about academic libraries getting serious about achieving progress through collaboration. By sharing their resources to promote open textbooks, look for more institutions to report significant savings to students through open textbook adoptions.

3) Community Growth: In our 2014 article, we mentioned that we had identified librarians at 40 institutions who had an interest in OER. Since then, we have organized this group through a discussion list, which now comprises more than 450 participants from at least 150 institutions and more than a thousand posts. The good news is that faculty and other academic support colleagues, such as instructional designers, are joining our community and working with librarians to advocate for and advance OER adoption. The Open Textbook Network is facilitating this process by offering workshops and resources to faculty interested in adopting open textbooks.

4) Visibility at Conferences: Librarians have become an increasingly large constituency at OER-related conferences and events. Shortly after our 2014 article was published, we coordinated the first-ever daylong track for libraries and OER as part of the Open Education Conference, which is the OER community’s main annual event. The track achieved what we had hoped: not only did it draw a significant number of librarians to the conference, but it also introduced the OER community to the importance of librarians as partners. The track has remained a part of the programs in 2015 and 2016, and librarians have contributed at least in part to the growing size of the conference.

5) Evolving Relationship with College Stores: Librarians report that when advocating for textbook affordability on campus, faculty and administrators will sometimes ask how OER adoption will impact sales at the bookstore. In the past, it was thought that there would be a contentious relationship between the college store and libraries advocating for OER adoption. It was assumed the college store would fight textbook affordability efforts as a threat to revenue. If the National Association of College Stores’ Learning Content Ecosystem Initiative is an indicator, then college stores have grown to embrace the value of affordable learning material. This trend recognizes that the path forward in an increasing “open” world is to partner with faculty, administrators, IT, and librarians to achieve a better model for the delivery of learning content.

Libraries and the Evolving OER Ecosystem

Alongside the growing momentum of OER in the library community, the broader OER ecosystem has been gaining momentum as well — and opportunities for library leadership abound. OER has gained support at the highest levels of government, with an explicit commitment from the White House to advance Open Education in the U.S. Open Government National Action Plan and the Department of Education’s “GoOpen” Campaign, which seeks to expand OER in K-12 schools. This support has translated into policy changes, as more agencies add open licensing requirements to federal grants to ensure educational materials produced by grantees are shared as OER with the public. As these policies begin to become more common, academic libraries can play a role in supporting and educating grant recipients on campus — the same way that libraries have stepped up to support their campuses’ implementation of public access policies for federally funded research.

Similarly, there are developments at the state and system levels. In the last two years alone, OER-related legislation has been introduced in more than 20 states, and budget appropriations for OER programs have been approved in California, Connecticut, North Dakota, and Oregon. Statewide OER programs have emerged at the Board of Regents level in Georgia and Louisiana, and a national consortium of 38 community colleges recently launched an initiative to build OER-supported degree programs. Academic librarians have critical roles to play in these initiatives as experts who can help craft successful plans and support their implementation.

Five Ways to Advance OER Right Now

As an academic librarian concerned about textbook affordability at your institution, what next steps can you take to become part of the emerging OER ecosystem? Here are a few ways to help your library become a campus leader in promoting OER and textbook affordability:

1) Plan an Institutional Strategy: While the library cannot go it alone, you will make progress more quickly by assembling a campus coalition involving multiple concerned partners, such as the campus store, teaching and learning center, academic affairs, disability services, faculty, students and others. Together an institutional textbook affordability taskforce can identify multiple strategies to implement and work together to support faculty to adopt affordable learning content.

2) Know the Data: Making a case for textbook affordability can benefit from presenting the latest research results and survey data to demonstrate the efficacy of OER and the latest trends in faculty awareness, faculty adoption, costs to students, etc. Bell’s OER Diigo Resource List includes links to many of these resources and adds new ones regularly.

3) Join the Network: Whether you become a part of the informal SPARC OER Forum that meets regularly to discuss OER issues or share knowledge about OER resources on the discussion list or the more formal Open Textbook Network, you will learn more and develop more rapidly as your campus OER advocate.

4) Show ‘Em the Goods: Consider buying a set of OpenStax open textbooks in hardcopy and turn it into a portable display for your own campus OER roadshow. Take it to student and faculty events. Use it during Open Access and Open Ed weeks. Display it in the library the first week of class when students are spending a fortune on textbooks. When they see and feel the open textbooks, it makes a difference and is a great way to start conversations about textbook affordability.

5) Be Positive — Don’t Demonize: It helps to have a message that keeps you focused when talking to campus colleagues about textbook affordability. Make it an affirming, positive message that speaks to the social good accomplished by a campus textbook affordability initiative. Avoid speaking negatively about commercial textbook publishers, faculty who assign expensive textbooks or the college store. It’s about creating partners, not making enemies.

When it comes to promoting the value of OER, it really does make a difference to “Think Global and Act Local.” While each of us can make considerable progress as local OER advocates to create change at our own institutions, joining together as a national or global coalition to form an OER movement will bring about widespread change in the way educators think about learning materials. Despite the amazing progress made in the last two years, there is still much to accomplish in establishing a true culture of openness in education.

Endnotes

2. http://research.cchd.umn.edu/ont/
9. Find Steven Bell’s OER Diigo list at https://www.diigo.com/user/blendedlibrarian/OER.
PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Nicole Allen is the Director of Open Education for SPARC. In this role she leads SPARC’s work on the issue area of Open Education, with a dual focus on public policy and engaging the library community to advance this issue on campus.

Nicole is an internationally recognized expert and leading voice in the movement for open education. Starting during her own days as a student, she has worked tirelessly to elevate the issue of college textbook costs and access to education into the public spotlight and to advance openness as a solution in both policy and practice. Drawing on her unique perspective as both a Millennial — the same generation as today's college students — and a professional with more than a decade of experience in this field, she has been widely cited in the media and has given hundreds of talks and trainings in more than a dozen countries on open education, open policy, and grassroots advocacy.

Nicole’s career began in 2006 with the Student Public Interest Research Groups, where she worked with college students across the United States to organize numerous large-scale grassroots campaigns on college affordability and related issues. In 2013, Nicole joined SPARC to develop and lead a new program on open education, which has since evolved into a national network of more than 100 academic librarians and a robust advocacy portfolio spanning state, national and international policy. She also continues to work with students through the Right to Research Coalition and as part of the organizing team for OpenCon.

Nicole graduated from the University of Puget Sound in 2006 with a Bachelor’s of Arts in Philosophy. Currently she splits her time between her home in Providence, RI and SPARC’s headquarters in Washington, DC.

BORN AND LIVED: Darreniscotta, ME.
EARLY LIFE: Spent in rural mid-coast Maine, oldest of 4 children.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Marilyn Billings is the Scholarly Communication & Special Initiatives Librarian at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a position she has held since 2006. She provides campus and national leadership and education in alternative scholarly communication strategies, including open access, open education and the role of digital repositories in today’s academic environment. Current activities include her management of the Office of Scholarly Communication at the W.E.B. DuBois Library, oversight of UMass Amherst's digital repository ScholarWorks and her leadership role of the campus' Open Education Initiative.

MS. BILLINGS’ RECENT PRESENTATIONS INCLUDE:
"UMASS Open Education Initiative: Perspective After 4 Years In," invited panel member for the Association of South East Research Libraries (ASERL) Lib-OER Community webinar series: Lessons from the Field: Models for Library Support of Alt-Textbooks with Steven Bell (Temple University), William Cross (North Carolina State University), and Melanie Kowalski (Emory University) on Jan 15, 2015.
"Building Your Fan Base: Promoting Your Repository On and Off Campus," invited speaker at the bpress IR All-Stars Tailgate pre-conference prior to the ACRL national conference in Portland, OR, March 25, 2015.
"Seeking Alternatives to High-cost Textbooks: The UMass Amherst Example," invited speaker for the University System of Georgia Library Services Affordable Learning Georgia webinar series, as a panel member with Cyril Oberlander (Humboldt State University) and Kate Pitcher (SUNY Geneseo) on April 15, 2015.
"The New Now: Institutional Repositories and Academia," invited keynote speaker at the Institutional Repository Day @ USM at the University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS on April 17, 2015.
"Savings are Nice but Learning is Niceer: Libraries Linking Open Textbooks with Instruction, Pedagogy and Assessment," co-presentation with Sarah Cohen, Open Education Conference, Vancouver, CN, November 19, 2015.
"Library Strategies for Sustainable Open Education Adoption and Publishing," co-presentation with Shane Nackerud, Cyril Oberlander, and Kate Pitcher, Open Education Conference, Vancouver, CN, November 19, 2015.
"The Power of Open Education: UMass Amherst's Open Education Initiative, Springboard for New Career Choices," invited speaker at SPARC Meeting on Openness in Research & Education (MORE), San Antonio, TX, March 8, 2016.

She was one of the organizers of the first ACRL/SPARC Open Education pre-conference in Chicago, IL, Jan 30-31, 2015 prior to ALA Mid-Winter where she also gave a presentation on the Open Education Initiative at UMass Amherst and discussed best practices and lessons learned since its start in 2011. Her most recent publication "Spreading the Word, Building a Community: Vision for a National OER Movement," co-authored with

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