OER Stories

Published 3/27/2019 by Ashley Ribbel

in the March 2019 issue

Open Education Resources (OER) are "teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under a license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others" (Hewlett Foundation).

The OER Stories series highlights faculty who are using or developing OERs. This article consists of questions answered by Michael Wade and Melissa Warner, the recipients of the OER Grants that were announced in Fall 2018.

What sparked your interest in OERs? – Michael Wade
I had never heard of OERs until I saw the "Cracking Open Textbooks: Exploring Free Textbooks and Course Resources" breakout session at *Teaching & Learning Day* in February 2018. In that session, Jennifer Peters showcased how Debi Tziatis had put all the material for PPS100 – Professional Presentation Skills on a website using free material so that the students in her class wouldn't have to buy a textbook. (To learn more about this OER, see the OER Stories article from the December 2018 issue of the Academic Newsletter.) I thought it was a great idea, but it wasn't the right time to seriously consider OERs; we were in the midst of a three-year commitment with our textbook for BAM101 – Introduction to Business Administration. Near the end of 2018, I was about to put together a committee to choose a new textbook when I received the email about OER grants available to faculty to develop an OER textbook, so the timing was perfect.

How will you use OER in your teaching and learning? – Michael Wade
I am using two American open textbooks and one Canadian open textbook; I'm incorporating parts from each to make a book that will cover our unique needs for BAM101. I will have a link in my Blackboard course site that will take the students directly to the OER textbook – no need for a user code or separate login ID.

In class, when I assigned a case or referred to something from the textbook, only about half the students participated – the ones that have purchased the textbook. Now, all my students will have free access to the text which will lead to better classroom discussions and homework completion rates.

For a discipline like business, content and examples go out of date very quickly. We were traditionally using a textbook for three years and by the third year, companies referenced in the book had gone bankrupt or the economic numbers had changed. With an OER, we can update the content and examples before each semester.

I also intend to get student feedback, especially during the first semester of using the OER. The students can tell us what sections were worded in a difficult manner. This will be especially helpful for our international and ESL students. Sometimes we don't realize we're using difficult words or Canadian examples that not everyone is familiar with. We can take their feedback and adapt the book each semester to better meet the needs of our diverse student body.

What work is involved in adapting an open text? – Melissa Warner
The work involved in writing an open text varies depending on which text you are adapting and how applicable it is to your context. The work effort involved in adapting your OER needs to be carefully considered prior to beginning the project. Various factors will impact funding and timelines of your OER adaptation. Below are some questions to ask yourself before embarking on the OER project that will impact your project plan:

1. Within which country context is the current text written. Will I need to adapt it to a different geographical context?

2. How long is the text? Is this inline with the envisioned length we desire/need? Note that length of text is an important consideration for logistical reasons such as cost to the student for printing as well as impacting student learning. Significant cutting also impacts more time-consuming aspects of an adaptation such as ensuring all the references and learning outcomes have been removed that relate to the sections of the text you have cut.

3. Is the text currently written at an appropriate level for my students, or will significant revisions need to be made to the sentence structure, words chosen, and overall reading level?

4. What additional resources will I have when working on the OER adaptation? For example, do we have an editor available for this project? Do we have a graphics design person?

5. Do in-text exercises like sample equations, applied case studies or scenarios exist already for the text or do we need to develop those?

6. Do ancillary resources (e.g., PowerPoints and test banks) exist already for the text, or do they need to be developed?

7. Will there be project management components to the work, such as weekly updates steering committees, etc.?

After you have considered all these factors that may impact the project plan for your OER, a project plan should be developed with the appropriate timelines and work effort allocated.

As you are implementing the project plan, make sure the key stakeholders are kept informed of the progress.

Any advice for colleagues interested in adapting an open text? – Melissa Warner
I would have 4 main pieces of advice regarding adapting an open text:

1. Be sure to get all the core faculty on board who teach the course. Without faculty buy-in and support, the project will not succeed.

2. Ensure to properly draw out a project plan. In my experience, the work to adapt the open text took more time than I originally anticipated. The questions above are critical to ask before the project starts.

3. Do not forget that one of the beauties of an open text is that they can continue to be adapted! Do not worry about perfection of all ancillary resources, for example. The test bank, for example, can be an ongoing work-in-progress as the project unfolds.

4. Pilot test the open text, ideally within one school. There will be lots to learn and you want to ensure you have built in the opportunity to make adaptations based on lessons learned from the implementation.

View the March 2019 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

<div style="background:#e8331c;color:#fff;padding:8px;display:inline-block;font-weight:bold;">March 2019 issue</div>

tags : educational-technology, educational-technology-tools, march-2019, seneca-libraries, teaching-and-learning, the-teaching-and-learning-centre