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We at Cengage are proud to support this booklet on OER put together by Inside Higher Ed. There is so much to like about OER. How can we make education more affordable? More personalized? More responsive to the events and issues shaping our world? What's not to like about the concept of high-quality online resources for free? These are the questions every higher education institution is asking.

For Cengage, OER is something to embrace, not fear, and for years we have welcomed instructors to integrate other types of content including OER into our platforms. OER has the potential to lower costs while maintaining other success metrics. But with tens of millions of open educational resources to choose from and our students' futures at stake, how do we work together to make sure these resources are selected and used effectively?

The answer is that OER on its own is terrific...but OER combined with technology and instructional design principles is even better.

We are actively developing a variety of OER-based offerings, including products that take pure OER and combine with our technology to improve efficacy and outcomes. But at the same time, we are experimenting with augmenting OER with other content to find affordable solutions for students. We know that OER can be a powerful complement to proprietary content.

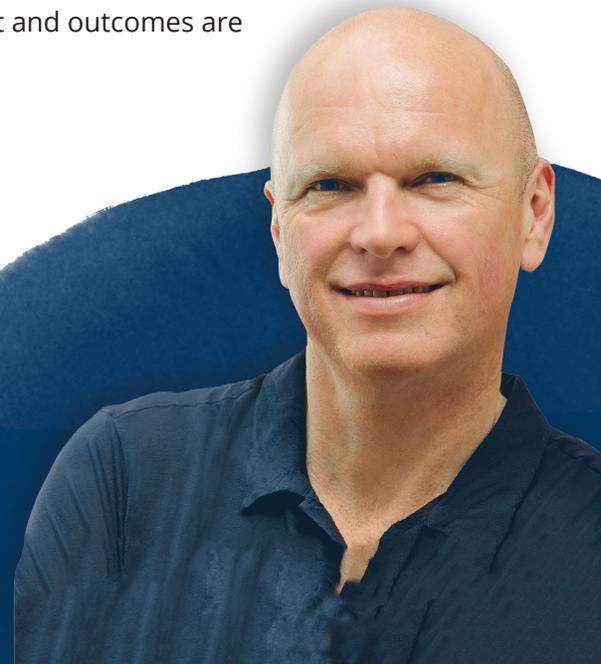
By delivering OER via our platforms, we support teachers and learners with powerful learning technology, including formative and summative assessments, engaging homework activities and other tools. The inclusion of OER allows us to offer all of this at a lower price point.

OER will continue to play a critical role in the future of learning. And Cengage will continue to focus on helping all learners achieve their goals.

Let's work together to forge a path forward with OER—one where cost and outcomes are improved hand in hand for the benefit of all students.



Michael Hansen
CEO
Cengage



Introduction

The movement for open educational resources – free online materials to use instead of or in addition to textbooks – is experiencing unprecedented momentum. OER resources have proliferated, while concerns about all of the costs of attending college (including textbooks) have continued to grow. The combination is creating an OER moment.

The articles in this compilation explore national initiatives and campus-based efforts to promote the use of open educational resources. Other articles place OER within the context of other pushes for change in higher education – and highlight some of the challenges that remain for OER.

Inside Higher Ed – and our new specialized publication *Inside Digital Learning* – will continue to cover OER. We welcome your comments on this compilation and your ideas for future coverage.

--The Editors

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News

A selection of articles by *Inside Higher Ed* reporters

Scaling Up OER

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM // JUNE 22, 2016

New initiatives at university systems show the maturation of efforts to increase the use of open educational resources.



The effort to replace textbooks with open educational resources (OER) is gaining momentum as colleges move past pilots to expand the use of free or inexpensive course materials across states and systems.

In states such as New Hampshire and New York, university systems are undertaking new initiatives that build on years of lessons learned about using OER in the classroom.

At the same time, organizations such as Achieving the Dream are investing millions of dollars to help community colleges in 13 different states build OER-based degree programs.

Those initiatives join others in progress in states such as Arizona, for example, where Maricopa Community College has used OER to save students more than \$5 million in textbook costs, and Virginia,

which is [expanding](#) Tidewater Community College's idea of a zero-textbook-cost degree program to 15 other institutions.

While OER advocates aren't yet prepared to say these initiatives represent a new phase for the proliferation of free or low-cost course materials, they acknowledged that the focus appears to be shifting away from individual courses and toward centralized efforts aimed at helping

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faculty members create alternatives to commercial textbooks or to think about opening up their teaching and research.

“It’s institutions thinking more broadly about what ‘open’ means and how open connects to a variety of different areas,” said Nicole Allen, director of open education at the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, known as SPARC.

“We’ve seen for the last decade institutions working to open up access to scholarly research. As that has gained momentum and OER has gained momentum, there’s been a convergence of openness in all these areas.”

The State University of New York System has since 2012 operated its own OER publisher, known as Open SUNY Textbooks. The publishing initiative, which is based at SUNY Geneseo, has produced 17 titles, including textbooks on college-level writing and end-of-life nursing care, as well as more specialized titles.

Open SUNY Textbooks earlier this month announced that it would expand beyond publishing with the launch of SUNY OER Services. Structured as a membership organization, the initiative will offer professional development for faculty members, instructional designers and librarians, a publishing platform, and a support network for participants at different campuses

to connect with one another.

“In order for this to scale effectively, faculty have to be involved -- it has to be coming from them,” Katherine Pitcher, Geneseo’s interim library director, said in an interview. “The drive for us is to get the pieces in place so the faculty can do it. It’s their courses. It’s their content. ... We’re just providing the network and the platform and the services to get them started.”

Pitcher said that SUNY OER Services was created in response to some of the challenges Open SUNY Textbooks has encountered -- particularly the frustration facul-

“ We’ve seen for the last decade institutions working to open up access to scholarly research. As that has gained momentum and OER has gained momentum, there’s been a convergence of openness in all these areas. ”

ty members sometimes feel when searching for open content to include in their courses.

Awareness and discovery [continue to be major issues](#) facing the growth of OER. While faculty members who are aware of OER are generally enthusiastic about the quality and ease of use of such course materials, even they admit to sometimes struggling to find the content they are looking for. Additionally, many faculty members know little to nothing about OER.

“We want to make sure we develop services that address that,” Pitcher said. “We need to develop

faculty champions who can go out and advocate for faculty.”

Other university systems are including OER in a broader push to reshape how faculty members teach and conduct research. The University System of New Hampshire this month [kicked off a yearlong open education initiative](#) that, in addition to OER, encompasses collaboration between instructors and students and open-access publishing.

Together, the three components of the initiative make up “what it means to be a faculty member at a public institution,” said Scott Robison, co-director of the Center for

Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Plymouth State University.

The initiative, he added, will challenge faculty members to rethink “the way you teach and how you share your research

with the public.”

“What we’re seeing is a pretty dramatic shift in the way higher education is progressing,” Robison said in an interview. “In an age of information where anybody can Google anything and get the right answer, we’re seeing the shift from the content to the process.”

The four-campus system three weeks ago hosted its annual [Academic Technology Institute](#), where participating faculty members workshopped their plans to teach using OER, redesign courses and pursue new scholarly publishing outlets. The projects vary in scope,

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Robison said; one faculty member, for example, plans to encourage students to share their course work publicly, while another will rebuild a course from the ground up with input from students.

The system selected 10 projects from each campus -- 15 from the University of New Hampshire. Throughout the next academic year, the system will assess how students feel about open education -- including their experiences with OER -- and decide how best to expand the initiative. SUNY will look at similar measures, using a framework already in use by Open SUNY Textbooks.

Like SUNY, the New Hampshire system's initiative builds on previous experiments with OER.

Last year, faculty at UNH participated in an OER pilot, saving students about \$148,000 in the process.

"Over the past several years we've been building on what we've done and expanding it," Robison said. He said he'd like to see the open edu-



Nicole Allen, Director of Open Education at SPARC

cation initiative expanded beyond its one-year duration, perhaps by inviting more faculty members or by eventually establishing a systemwide OER center. "Whatever it is, we'll at least continue what we're doing."

Both SUNY and USNH used system funding to provide money for their initiatives. SUNY OER Services received funding to hire an administrator, while USNH nearly tripled the \$100,000 budget of its Academic Technology Institute to support

participating faculty members' projects.

Some of that funding will find its way to faculty members in the form of incentives. Faculty members in the New Hampshire system receive a \$2,000 stipend for participating, and some additional funding has been set aside in case they need to hire outside help, such as a designer, Robison said.

Pitcher agreed that there need to be incentives in place for faculty members in order for OER to take root on the campuses in the SUNY system.

She said the most powerful incentive could be to change tenure and promotion requirements to reward faculty members who participate in open education initiatives. For others, she said, the "intrinsic motivation" of creating their own textbooks may be enough. "Partly what we're saying is this is the time for faculty to take back their content and license it the way they want," Pitcher said. "That's what the academy's about -- sharing knowledge." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/06/22/new-university-initiatives-focus-bringing-open-educational-resources-masses>

OER IS EVOLVING.



1 in 5

college students
has skipped or deferred
a class due to cost of
course materials*



39%

of faculty
respondents have
never heard of OER*



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*Source: Cengage Learning: *OER and the Evolving Higher Ed Landscape* 2016

'A Mean Amount of Money'

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM // APRIL 14, 2017

Administrators at CUNY and SUNY look to seize an \$8 million opportunity to drastically expand the use of open educational resources at their campuses.

The City University of New York and State University of New York systems are preparing for the conversation about college affordability to shift to the cost of textbooks as the state rolls out its free-tuition plan.

Governor Andrew Cuomo and state legislators [announced](#) Saturday they had reached a deal that will make tuition free at CUNY and SUNY. Known as the Excelsior Scholarship, the program could help as many as 940,000 families afford higher education, according to one estimate.

As the state prepares to launch the program this fall, administrators at the two university systems are planning for an influx of low-income students for whom the add-on costs of higher education -- such as textbooks -- represent a significant barrier to enrolling.

"Tuition may be free, but the rest

of college still isn't," said Carey Hatch, associate provost for academic technologies and information services at SUNY.

The deal also contains some funding to address that issue: \$8 million, to be split by the two systems. According to the [announcement](#), the money will be used to "provide open educational resources, including ebooks, to students at SUNY and CUNY colleges to help defray the prohibitive cost of textbooks."

At SUNY, administrators are still "trying to get our heads around" the impact \$4 million could have on reducing the number of students who are unable to afford textbooks, Hatch said.

"This isn't a nice one-off innova-



tion," Hatch said. "This is something that can be incredibly impactful for our students. If you can save students \$700 a semester, that's a month's rent."

New York is [one of many states](#) that are targeting textbook costs as part of a larger effort to bring down the cost of higher education. Early experiments with OER often began with a single professor testing alter-

natives to commercial textbooks in a single class, but the last few years have seen an increase in OER initiatives at the state or university system level.

At the moment, Hatch said, the system hopes to eliminate textbook costs for 100,000 student enrollments, and plans to distribute funding to campuses that want to use OER in courses where they will benefit the greatest number of students -- large introductory general-education courses, for example.

"My assumption is we're not just going to distribute the money out to the individual campuses," Hatch said. "We will be very targeted, and we will work with the campuses that are really willing to help drive it to scale."

Some of the funding may find its way to [SUNY OER Services](#), a membership organization that works with campuses in the system as they grow the use of OER. SUNY OER Services originally launched as Open SUNY Textbooks, a publishing initiative, which has relied on a series of grants to publish 20 free textbooks. The last two titles are expected to be released before the end of the semester.

In an effort to become financially self-sustaining, Open SUNY Textbooks last year said it would focus on services. Alexis Clifton, executive director of SUNY OER Services, said the funds in the budget deal earmarked for OER will accelerate that

shift.

"With this new, wonderful infusion of funds, our primary goal is going to be less on the creation of brand-new materials whole cloth and more in partnering faculty and campuses with resources that already exist and are well-defined, peer reviewed and in good shape to serve the needs of this incoming population of students," Clifton said in an interview.

SUNY OER Services doesn't have any paying members yet, but the organization works with about a dozen campuses in the system, including five community colleges that have received grants from Achieving the Dream to build zero-textbook-cost degree programs.

"Textbook prices are another significant barrier to entry for many college students, and textbook prices off the shelf can be one-third to half of tuition, especially at community colleges," Clifton said. "This specific attention and funding for OER means that the state's really making a concerted effort to acknowledge that this is a barrier, and maybe not one that students are aware of when they first enroll."

CUNY promotes open educational resources in a number of different ways, including grant programs and the repository CUNY Academic Works, where faculty members can deposit materials for their colleagues across the system to find.

With its \$4 million, CUNY plans to

expand an existing grant program to create up to 300 zero-textbook-cost courses or convert existing courses that use commercial textbooks. The system is looking for colleges that can commit to creating five, 15 or even 25 such courses, and five sections of each course, said Greg Gosselin, interim university dean of libraries and information systems.

The one-time grants to colleges that volunteer to participate will include stipends for course development and faculty training, money for technical support and funds for participating libraries, Gosselin said.

Since the money must be spent in the next fiscal year and the prospects of future funding are unclear, "We need to get a lot of bang for the buck, and we need to make a serious impact," Gosselin.

Administrators at both university systems said they plan to work more closely together to maximize the impact of the funding.

The two systems have been in constant contact since news of the budget deal broke last week, Ann Fielder, open education librarian at CUNY, said in an interview. So far, discussions have ranged from creating a shared catalog of OER courses to finding ways to support each other's campuses.

"It's a mean amount of money," Fiddler said, adding that the funding has the potential to create millions of dollars in savings for students. "The potential is just enormous." ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/14/cuny-suny-plan-major-expansion-oer-efforts>

STILL FIGURING IT OUT WHEN IT COMES TO OER?

“Only about **14** efficacy studies

examine the impact of OER on student outcomes. More research must be done.”

Kim Grewe

Doctoral Candidate at Old Dominion University

LET'S FIGURE IT OUT TOGETHER.

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Trial and Error: Cutting Textbook Costs

BY JEAN DIMEO // MARCH 29, 2017

Lynn University strives to slash students' spending while increasing the quality -- and use -- of course materials.

Institution: Lynn University

The Problem: Lynn, a private university in Florida, found that many of its 2,800 students, who come from all economic backgrounds, were not buying some textbooks (print or digital) because they said they cost too much. Administrators and faculty members believed that not having textbooks for the courses was hurting student success.

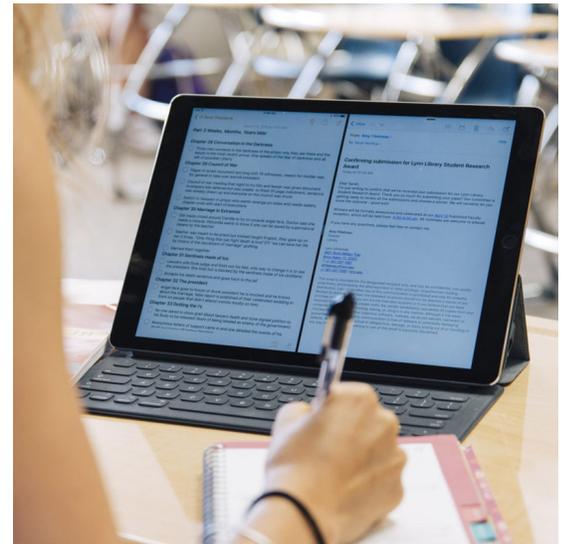
The Goal: Create free digital faculty-written textbooks and materials for core curriculum courses that would be easily accessible to all students enrolled in those classes. (All Lynn freshmen are provided Apple iPads, upgraded from [minis](#) just a few years ago.) The main purpose of the iBooks, as they are called, was to lower student costs; however, Lynn hoped they would also increase engagement between students and instructors.

The Experiment: A few years ago, Lynn established a university

press to support faculty-written ebooks created for iPads. [Lynn University Digital Press](#), which operates out of the institution's library, in some ways formalized the authoring process between faculty members, instructional designers, librarians and others that had been taking place at the university for years.

Lynn asked faculty members to write digital textbooks for core courses because all undergraduates take them; that's also where the university believed it could have the biggest initial impact slashing textbook spending. Amy Filiatreau, director of the library, said during a presentation at the annual meeting of the Association of College and Research Libraries last week that Lynn gives any faculty author an Apple MacBook and a \$2,000 stipend per course.

The faculty-written book program is just one of the university's efforts



Lynn students all receive iPads, which is how they access faculty-authored course materials.

to reduce textbook costs. Lynn also implemented a textbook reserve program, in which it keeps at least one copy of every required textbook available for loan at the library. Plus, it's moving to open education resources (OER) or library-licensed ebooks.

What Worked (and Why): Since the initiative began a few

years ago, Lynn has more than 40 faculty-written iBooks in use and 12 more in the pipeline. Filiatreau said this week that the free books will save Lynn students about \$250,000 during the 2016-17 academic year (as compared with the cost of buying all-new textbooks).

The faculty has enthusiastically embraced writing the ebooks, Filiatreau said, adding most of the content is written by long-term instructors. She also said iBooks allow instructors to tailor the content to their courses' needs, keep the content fresh and relevant, and structure a curriculum that complements conversations in the classroom.

Plus, faculty authors immediately add their iBooks into the institution's LMS as the default course materials.

Finally, the Lynn campus book-



It's still like herding cats....
Faculty will do what they want to do.



store, which no longer sells textbooks, is supporting the project, Filiatreau said. The bookstore doesn't distribute the digital iBooks directly, but works with an online third-party bookseller, MBS Direct, to get them to students.

What Hasn't (and Why):

Although faculty members are enthusiastic about writing the course materials, there are challenges. "It's still like herding cats," Filiatreau told several hundreds of librarians attending the ACRL conference, in Baltimore. "Faculty will do what they want to do."

Also, Lynn found that the instructor-written books need to be thoroughly edited, so it had to hire an

editor. Likewise, the university had to create an editorial committee to review content for instructional merit.

Next Steps:

Lynn is implementing a blind-peer-review process for all faculty-generated iBooks; the first "handful" is being evaluated now by reviewers not associated with the university, Filiatreau said. Students will continue using beta versions of the books while they are being reviewed, she added.

Besides the core curriculum, faculty members now are writing iBooks to replace textbooks in courses with high numbers of students and multiple sections.

Going forward, the university's goal is make all faculty-produced course materials "living books" that are highly interactive and all contain graphics, quizzes and lots of videos, Filiatreau said. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/03/29/trial-and-error-cutting-textbook-costs>



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'Baby Steps' to Reduce Textbook Costs

BY JEAN DIMEO // JUNE 7, 2017

University of Utah faculty members balked at the idea of moving to open educational resources, so a team that includes library and bookstore employees is promoting 13 options -- including OER.



UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Like many institutions, the University of Utah is seeking ways to reduce textbook and course material costs for its 29,000 students. One thing is clear: Students aren't buying as many textbooks at the campus bookstore. In just three years, textbook sales fell from \$8 million to \$4 million during the 2016-17 academic year, and the bookstore director Dan Archer said sales will continue to tumble.

Allyson Mower, Utah's assistant librarian, Archer and other university officials contend students are buying fewer books because of their high price tags, and that that's impeding some learners' success in

courses.

Mower, who is an advocate of free open educational resources, said there was a movement on campus led by librarians to get faculty to implement OER in their courses, but that many instructors were skeptical and balked at the idea.

"If it hasn't come through the publishing industry, it lacks peer review," Archer recalled some Utah faculty members saying about OER.

Plus, many instructors, especially those who've been teaching for decades, are reluctant to restructure their courses with new OER materials, Mower said.

In 2014, a Utah Faculty Senate

committee conducted a six-month study of textbook and material costs; the top two recommendations were for faculty members to assign older books or to use OER. The report also said that the university needed a group on campus to help professors streamline the process of finding and implementing course materials.

That year, the Course Material Services Team was organized; it is made up of staff members from the library, bookstore, print and mail services department, Teaching and Learning Technologies, and the registrar's office – people who have expertise working with publishers

and other course materials providers and understand the importance of lowering textbook and material costs, Mower said.

The team members knew they couldn't "come out with guns blazing" advocating for OER adoption, Mower said, and have opted for a pragmatic approach that they hope, over time, will persuade instructors to employ more cost-effective textbook options.

"We want the professor to be more cognizant of what she's selecting," the librarian said. "It's making sure that the assigned material is serving a purpose. That's at the core of this change."

First Steps

One of the first things the team did was ask instructors to provide information about their course materials, including costs, by the

time registration opened so that students knew, in advance, the name of the book and its cost. That information helps students make choices, and gives the bookstore enough time to get the books in stock by the first day of classes, Mower said.

In 2014, 40 percent of instructors provided their course information by the deadline; during the past academic year, the number rose to 54 percent. The team's goal for the 2017-18 academic year is 80 percent – a lofty goal, admitted Rick Anderson, associate dean of collections and scholarly communica-

tion at the Utah library. But, he said, "Sometimes a goal is the North Star that just keeps you on target."

Besides mailing information to professors, team members now are meeting with deans and department heads, asking them to spread the word to instructors about providing the course materials information by the registration date, Mower said.

"We are trying to get this information to 2,000 [faculty members]," she said. "That's a lot of people."

Another goal for the coming year is to add several faculty members to the team, ones who have a broad perspective on textbooks, not just

on eReserve

- Books or films on reserve
- Fair use film clips on university's Canvas learning management system
- On-demand printing and support for self-authored content
- Finding older editions to minimize costs to students
- A buyback program with multi-year adoption options
- Inclusive access implementation and management
- OER discovery and integration

"We don't push; we just explain approaches," Mower said. "We are taking baby steps."

After a consultation in April, one professor negotiated with a textbook publisher to reduce the cost of a book for a multiple-year agreement from \$170

to \$89, Mower said.

Instructor Cheryl Wright, who attended a presentation by the team last year, began offering her undergraduate students older book options last fall. During the spring semester, Wright, an associate professor in the department of family and consumer studies, taught a course with an open source book published by the University of Minnesota that she found through the team.

"The book is fabulous," Wright said, adding that it's available in a variety of formats. "It worked real-

“ The book is fabulous.... it worked really well for the course. It covered a lot of great topics that created a lot great discussions in class. And it helped alleviate some of the cost burden our students have. ”

knowledge of materials they or their colleagues use, Mower said.

Free Consultations

The team recently began offering course material consultations to faculty members. The consultations cover:

- Publisher price negotiations
- Library-licensed e-books and journal articles
- Streaming media licensing and file management
- Custom course pack publishing
- Copyright permissions
- Fair use book chapter or more

The OER Moment

ly well for the course. It covered a lot of great topics that created a lot of great discussions in class. And it helped alleviate some of the cost burden our students have.” Wright said she will “actively look for open source books” for other classes.

OER Challenges

Besides skepticism, Mower said one of the big hurdles for OER adoption at Utah and other institutions is the lack of advocates. Publishers, she noted, employ sales representatives, working on commission, to hawk textbooks to faculty members and campus bookstores.

“There are no equivalent sales reps for OER like there are traditional textbooks,” Mower said. “No one is saying they are going to stand up



Dan Archer, Director of the University of Utah Campus Store

the quality of OER.”

Another hurdle is the lack of time and understanding. “Advocates for OER are saying it’s better for the

student, but the professor is saying ‘how am I going to change the course?’ “

Wright said one of her colleagues is using an open source book, too, but she noted that many faculty members who have been teaching for decades are reluctant to consider OER because “there is some resistance to change.”

Nevertheless, Utah’s provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, Ruth Watkins, supports OER and the team’s ongoing efforts, Mower, Archer and Anderson agreed.

“We explicitly backed away from the term OER because the push-back was so pronounced, but it will come up again,” Anderson said. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/06/07/u-utahs-efforts-reduce-textbook-costs>

OER, on the Ground

BY SCOTT JASCHIK // APRIL 26, 2017

How one community college district is winning faculty converts -- with training, an active role by librarians and financial incentives -- to a new approach to course materials.

NEW ORLEANS -- Major new initiatives on open educational resources are announced [one](#) after [the other](#) these days. Many experts and even many publishers believe that the era of free online educational materials is here.

The annual meeting of the American Association of Community Colleges here featured numerous sessions on the topic. One focused on how challenging it can be to translate the enthusiasm for OER in theory into on-the-ground results, with professors shifting from expensive textbooks to low-cost or no-cost online educational materials.

Two librarians and a faculty member from the Community Colleges of Spokane discussed with enthusiasm why they saw OER as crucial to helping students. But they also stressed that the shift is not easy -- and this is particularly the case if a college is wooing faculty members and not ordering them around.

That's very much the attitude at Spokane. "We don't tell professors

what to do," said Mary Ann Lund Goodwin, executive director of library services for the college district. "They work on their own and we support their work."

In a few years, the colleges have gone from two faculty members using OER to 32, from a handful of sections to 78 -- still a minority of courses, but now enough that officials believe they are seeing a positive benefit, and setting the stage for other professors to sign on.

Goodwin started off by talking about she and others see OER as so important. To her, it's about student success. The college, like many others, reports that more students than in the past appeared to be skipping textbooks, even required textbooks, and raising concerns about all costs of attendance. OER, she said, should mean that everyone has the educational materials, and costs are limited.

Costs of new textbooks varies of course, but the colleges have a popular biology course where the



traditional materials cost \$178. For many community college students, that's real money.

Roshan Khattry, an economics instructor, said he didn't have any problems with the traditional textbook he had been assigning (picked by his entire department, so not something he personally selected) except for its cost, \$200.

"It was a good book, well written," he said. "But I had this nagging question: It's good, but is it worth \$200?"

Educating the Educators

The presentation here stressed the need to educate professors on what constitutes OER and where to find high-quality materials.

Heather Morgan, a librarian, illustrated the need to define terms by

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handing out red and green index cards to the attendees and then asking attendees to evaluate whether a series of resources were in fact OER by raising green cards when they thought something was OER and red for the opposite.

She started with an article from an online database -- which in this case was not OER. It's important for professors to realize that materials that seem free because the library has paid for them aren't in fact free -- and drive up institutional costs. She then distinguished between TED Talks (free but not something that an instructor can revise) and [OpenStax](#) resources (textbooks provided through a Rice University program and truly open, Morgan explained, because professors can use parts, change parts and do just about anything that makes sense to them).

The education is important, she said, because many professors fear that OER will mean a loss of quality and they may not always know what OER is. "It sounds to many like Wikipedia," she said, a resource on which professors have strong and conflicting views. But people need to see peer reviewed OER, with solid quality control in place, to get comfortable with it.

Much of that OER education is provided by librarians, both through professional development pro-

grams and one-on-one coaching of faculty members who want to adopt OER. "Librarians are marketers," she said, so it's natural to be telling faculty members about new resources.

The Community Colleges of Spokane have created various stipends for professors to encourage them to pursue OER. One of the stipends is a faculty member/librarian collaboration grant, in which professors receive not only funds but assurances of extra time from a librarian to work with them. Morgan also stressed the role of instructional designers, who frequently provide either quick answers or longer term assistance

completely replace paid course materials. While many others reported it taking far less time, the commitment is real.

Depending on the grants obtained by the colleges, stipends for converting a course were as high (in just a few cases) as \$15,000 and more typically were about \$1,200. Those who receive stipends must agree to share their materials with colleagues, so it becomes easier over time for professors to embrace OER without doing as much work as the pioneers do. All three speakers said that instructors feel pressed for time, and that colleges need to show

“

Depending on the grants obtained by the colleges, stipends for converting a course were as high (in just a few cases) as \$15,000 and more typically were about \$1,200.

”

they understand that before asking them to embrace a shift away from textbooks.

Khattry said that while the workload for professors was

to professors.

All three speakers here stressed that faculty members -- especially at the beginning -- need to be rewarded with money and/or course release time. Khattry, the instructor, joked (in part) that when he heard about a stipend that was available, "as an economist, I decided to apply."

Time Needed to Replace Materials

Creating OER material for a course takes real time, with some Spokane faculty members reporting that it took them more than 40 hours to

greatest at the point of converting a course to OER, there was plenty of work after that as well. "There were typos.

There were parts of the [OER] textbook that didn't work as well as they should have," he said. So that was more work for him and colleagues to fix.

Colleges that want to support OER need to have "the right culture," he said, such that glitches as OER is rolled out are not only tolerated (while being fixed), but considered part of the process.

Khattry also stressed that it was

important to remember the failings of traditional textbook selection, especially at the many institutions where this is done by committee.

He noted that OER allows faculty members to update all or part of their materials. In the old system for his department, “we had the same traditional textbook forever” because “economists never agree” so there wasn’t really an attempt to consider alternatives. So people need to remember that traditional textbooks and their use are far from perfect, he said.

Khattry also is still paying a lot of attention to student learning with OER. He tracked 130 students using the OER materials he created and



another 130 using the traditional textbook. The OER students earned slightly higher (though not statistically significant) grades.

Letting Students Know Their OER Options

Given that one of the motivations for promoting OER was to help students save money, one of the latest

changes at the Community Colleges of Spokane has been to add notations to the course catalog indicating which courses or sections use OER for some or all materials, such that they can be called “low cost” or “no cost” materials.

Spokane students appear to be voting with their feet.

In the winter 2017 quarter, courses using OER were filled 74 percent to capacity. Other courses were filled at 61 percent capacity.

In an era when colleges pay attention to enrollments in deciding which programs to support, that trend “could be another motivator” for faculty members to try OER, Goodwin said. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2017/04/26/faculty-member-and-librarians-discuss-how-college-makes-progress>

Where Open Textbooks Are Used

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM // JULY 26, 2016

While most faculty members are still unaware of open educational resources, use in introductory courses nearly rivals that of traditional textbooks, study finds.

Open educational resources are showing signs of taking root in introductory courses, yet overall awareness of alternatives to traditional textbooks continues to lag, a new study found.

More than half (58.1 percent) of the faculty members surveyed for “Opening the Textbook: Educational Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2015-16,” a [report](#) released this morning by the Babson Survey Research Group, said they were not aware of OER or how instructors can use free or inexpensive alternatives to traditional textbooks in their courses.

Compared to when the Babson Group in 2014 [surveyed](#) faculty members about the same topic, the responses in this year’s report highlight some familiar challenges for instructors considering OER. Almost half of all respondents (48 percent) said open materials are too hard to find, and that they don’t have access to a catalog showing the open resources available to them (45 percent) or a helpful colleague

who can mentor them (30 percent).

And while nearly nine out of 10 respondents (87 percent) said cost to students is an important or very important factor when considering which course materials to assign, many faculty members said there aren’t enough high-quality free or affordable course materials (28 percent) or simply enough open resources in their fields in general (49 percent) to make the switch from traditional textbooks.

“Faculty have a really strong level of displeasure with the cost of the materials, but many of them feel they don’t have any power to change it,” Jeff Seaman, co-director of the Babson Group, said in an interview. Alternatively, he added, faculty members are “unwilling to explore the lower-cost or free options, or they’re unaware of them.”

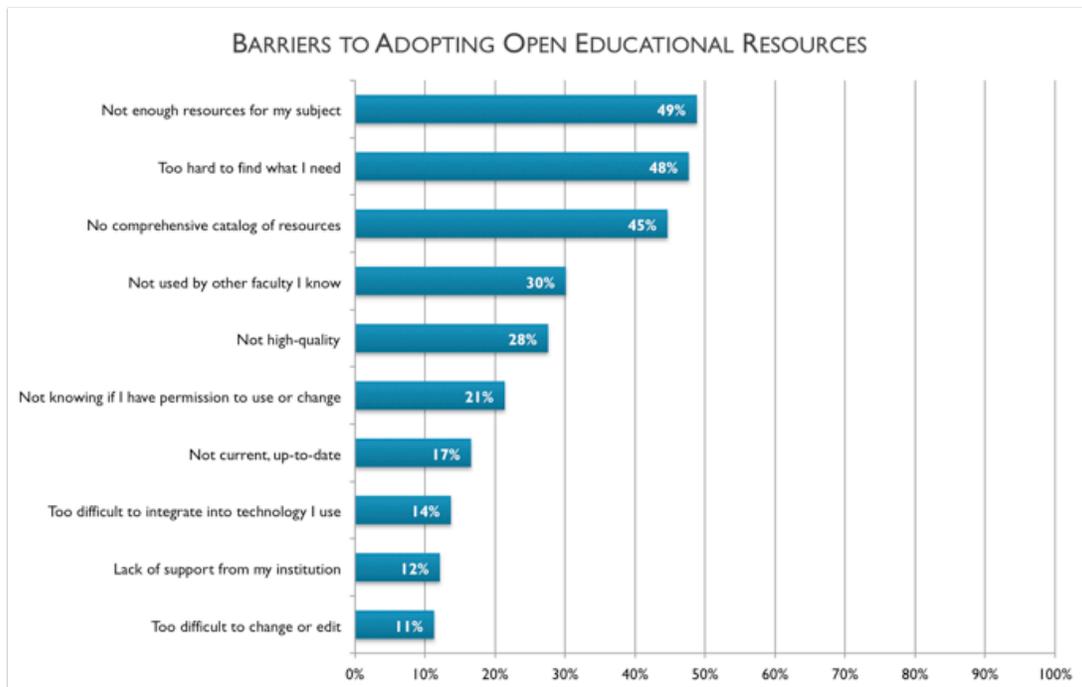
This is the first of three planned annual reports that will explore how open educational resources are making their mark on higher education. The research is supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foun-



ation.

The Babson Group surveyed a diverse group of faculty members for the report -- more than 3,000 in total, including those at two- and four-year institutions, working full and part time, on and off the tenure track, and with experience teaching online or blended courses.

The report also contains some good news for advocates of open resources and an indication that the



strategy used by many OER initiatives and providers is paying off.

Colleges and publishers, seeking to save the most money on textbook costs for the greatest number of students, have frequently used [large introductory courses](#) as settings for OER pilots. To explore how OER titles are doing in the market compared to traditional textbooks, the Babson Group asked faculty members who were creating new courses, modifying existing or picking new readings in 14 common introductory courses which title in a selection of popular textbooks they planned to assign. The lineups included titles from OpenStax, a free textbook publisher based at Rice University.

With an average adoption rate -- how likely the surveyed faculty members were to pick the title -- of 10 percent, the

OpenStax books were less popular than the average textbook (17 percent). Faculty members were also less likely to have heard of the titles (70 percent, versus 82 percent for the traditional textbooks).

Still, faculty members were nearly twice as likely to pick the OpenStax books in introductory courses than instructors generally picking OER ti-

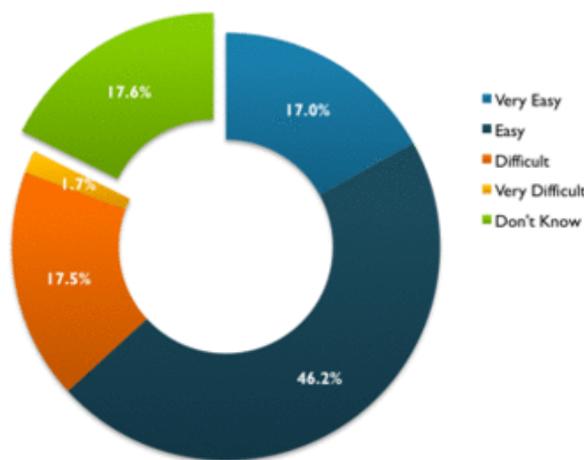
ties across all courses (5.3 percent). And OpenStax has reached the 10 percent mark without the sophisticated marketing infrastructure that other textbook publishers have had decades to optimize, Seaman pointed out.

"That puts [OpenStax] in the same ballpark after only being on the market for a couple of years," Seaman said. "They're going where they think the biggest need is. In one sense this says they're being reasonably successful at that."

OpenStax published its first textbook in 2012. Four years later, the publisher estimates more than 690,000 students have used its books, totaling a savings of about \$68 million.

"It's very gratifying to have this independent research validate what we've observed over the last two years," said Richard G. Baraniuk, the Victor E. Cam-

EASE OF SEARCHING TRADITIONAL PUBLISHERS



eron Professor of Engineering, who founded OpenStax. “Faculty teaching introductory courses are rapidly accepting high-quality open educational resources from OpenStax. They are willing to make changes when they discover high-quality resources that are easy to adopt and are free or very low cost for students.”

While awareness of open course materials has increased in the two years since the Babson Group last surveyed faculty members about course materials, a majority of instructors are still unaware of OER. In this year’s edition, nearly half of respondents (41.9 percent) said

“

Faculty have a really strong level of displeasure with the cost of the materials, but many of them feel they don’t have any power to change it.

”

they are aware of OER and how they can use the resources in their courses, up from about one-third (35.1 percent) two years ago.

Even the faculty members who said they are aware of OER said they sometimes struggle to find the open resources they are looking to include in their courses.

Of the faculty members who had an opinion about the ease of finding OER, about 60 percent of respondents described searching for OER as difficult or very difficult, com-

pared to about 23 percent who said the same about searching for traditional textbooks.

Seaman said the results suggest an opportunity for OER

providers to work together on how they can get the resources into the hands of faculty members. “The discovery issue is one area where OER have made very little -- if any -- progress,” he said.

The remaining two OER studies will include many of the same questions about awareness and barriers but go deeper into specific topics, Seaman said.

Next year’s study will likely focus on faculty perception of textbook costs, he said. ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/07/26/study-finds-use-open-educational-resources-rise-introductory-courses>

No Rush to 'Go Digital'

BY CARL STRAUMSHEIM // FEBRUARY 22, 2016

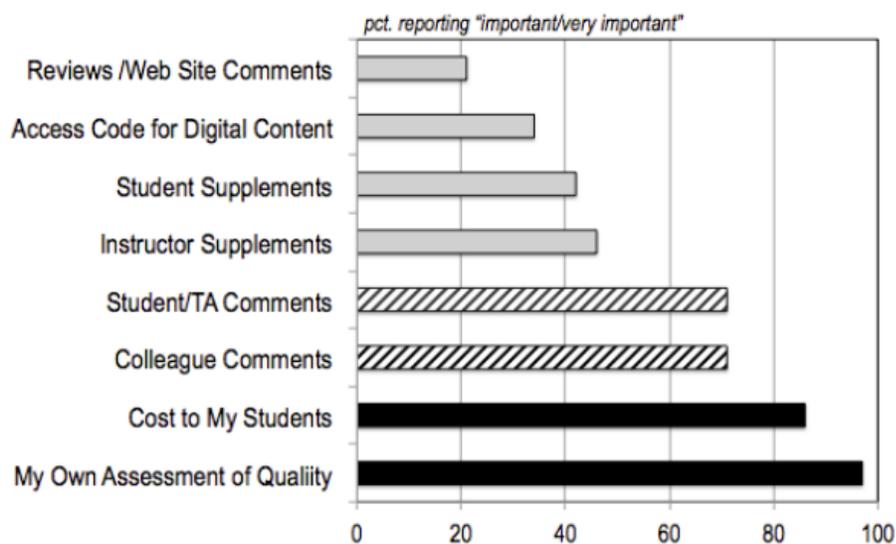
Study shows faculty members remain skeptical of digital course materials and generally unfamiliar with open educational resources.

Quality, cost, reputation -- in that order. Those are the top three factors that influence how faculty members pick which textbooks and course materials they assign, according to the results of a survey of faculty members at two- and four-year institutions.

Virtually every faculty member surveyed (97.1 percent) for "Going Digital," a report being presented today at the Independent College Bookstore Association retail conference in Orlando, Fla., said their own assessment of the quality of a textbook is an important or a very important factor influencing their course material selection process, followed by the cost (86.3 percent) and a near tie between comments from colleagues (71.2 percent) and students or teaching assistants (71.1 percent). Less than one-third of respondents (31.6 percent) said the availability of digital supplements played an important role in that process.

But responses to the central question of "Going Digital" suggest fac-

What Factors Influence Faculty Decisions About Course Materials?



ulty members are in no rush to get rid of physical textbooks. Only 15.1 percent of faculty members said they used primarily digital materials last fall. Of those who are still using print, 7.4 percent said they intend to make the switch this fall, while 27.3 percent and 17.1 percent see themselves switching in the next three or five years, respectively. Nearly one-quarter of all respondents (24

percent) said they will never primarily use digital materials in their courses.

Open educational resources, meanwhile, remain unknown or unused by all but 15 percent of faculty members, raising further questions about the lack of awareness about free or inexpensive alternatives to commercial textbooks.

Kenneth C. Green, who conduct-

The OER Moment

ed the survey on behalf of the ICBA, said publishers and course material providers that are investing in and counting on a transition from print to digital should not reconsider their priorities. “The issue is not a matter of if,” Green said in an interview. “It’s a matter of how.”

Faculty members gave plenty of reasons for why they prefer physical textbooks. A majority of those surveyed said digital course materials are more difficult to use (59 percent), offer lower quality (80.9 percent) and don’t provide any academic benefits compared to textbooks (72.3 percent).

But faculty members also indicated that there are issues beyond their control that are holding back widespread use of digital course materials. More than one-quarter of faculty members (27 percent) said their students don’t have easy access to laptops and tablets -- devices they would use to access those digital readings, videos and other resources. The issue is particularly prevalent at community colleges, where less than half of surveyed faculty members (47.2 percent) said students have access to those devices.

Faculty members aren’t universally negative toward digital course materials, the survey results show. On the issue of cost, for example, faculty members clearly prefer

them; nearly four out of five respondents (79 percent) said digital course materials are more affordable for students.

Even though the surveyed faculty members said they take the cost of textbooks into account, digital materials do not appear to be priced low enough to offset their perceived shortcomings. Digital materials should be “significantly less expensive” than print textbooks, 89.5 per-

cent of respondents said. In a hypothetical scenario where faculty members were guaranteed digital materials would save students 40 percent on textbook costs, slightly more than half of respondents (54.4 percent) said they would go all digital in their classrooms.

“Despite speculation or sound bites that faculty don’t care about the cost of materials for students,

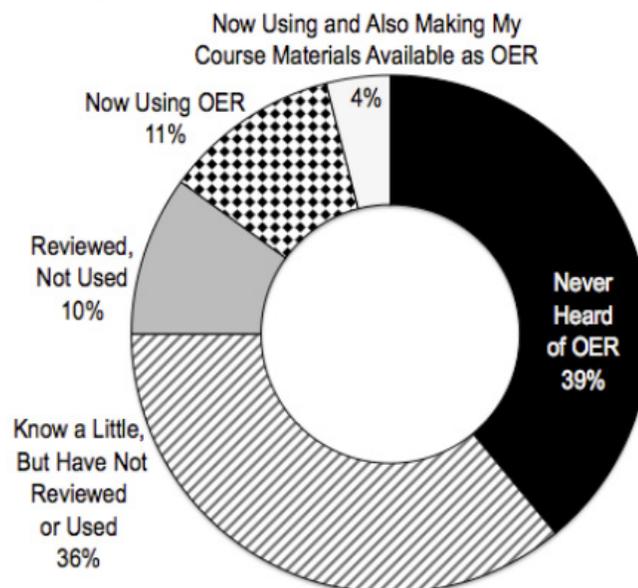
it’s clear that they do,” Green, founding director of the [Campus Computing Project](#), a higher education technology research organization, said. The findings come with an important caveat, Green pointed out: the survey demographics are not representative of higher education as a whole. Of the 2,902 faculty members surveyed, only 9 percent represented two-year institutions. Many community colleges have focused more on textbook affordability than other types of institutions, since such expenses make up a larger share of college costs for their students. Full-time faculty were also overrepresented, making up 81 percent of the survey respondents.

The results still corroborate what other surveys of the college bookstore and textbook market have found. Ed Schlichenmayer, deputy CEO of the National Association of College Stores, said the findings are in line with what the organization is seeing.

A recent [survey](#) of administrators, faculty members and staffers conducted by NACS also found that the use of digital course materials is growing slowly.

“We found that the potential for increased learning outcomes will come from more enhanced digital offerings such as adaptive learning courseware and platform-based products,” Schlichenmayer said in

The Faculty Experience with OER



cent of respondents said. In a hypothetical scenario where faculty members were guaranteed digital materials would save students 40 percent on textbook costs, slightly more than half of respondents (54.4 percent) said they would go all digital in their classrooms.

“Despite speculation or sound bites that faculty don’t care about the cost of materials for students,

The OER Moment

an email. “Moreover, institutions will need to consider a comprehensive learning content strategy if the transition to digital learning content and courseware is to proceed smoothly among both faculty and students.”

Much like a 2014 [survey](#) conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group, the ICBA survey shows that most faculty members know little to nothing about open educational resources.

Only 4 percent of respondents said they both use OER in their courses and make their own course material available to other instructors. An additional 11 percent said they have used OER, and another 10 percent have reviewed content. The remaining respondents had either never heard of OER (39 percent) or said they were aware of OER but had never reviewed any open content (36 percent).

Since so many respondents said they were unfamiliar with OER, 41.2 percent of faculty members said they will never primarily use open content in their courses. Asked what kind of open content they could see themselves using, faculty members were more likely to say videos (62 percent) than alternatives to commercial textbooks (47 percent).

The small share of respondents from community colleges could explain the lack of awareness of OER, since those institutions have been on the forefront of creating degree programs with zero textbook costs. OER providers have also largely targeted [lower-level courses](#) in order to serve as many students as possible.

OER have also made headlines at four-year institutions, such as a recent case at California State University at Fullerton where a faculty member was [reprimanded](#) for as-

signing two textbooks -- one listed at \$76 and the other free -- instead of a \$180 textbook co-written by two of his colleagues in the math department.

Brian Jacobs, CEO and founder of the OER platform panOpen, said faculty members are waiting for the “right combination of quality content and technology” to emerge before they feel comfortable leaving print books behind.

“This survey helps make clear that in order for digital educational materials to enter mainstream practice they cannot simply mimic physical textbooks and only modestly reduce costs,” Jacobs said in an email. “They must offer a compelling experience that is fundamentally different, available only in the new medium, and they must change the economics dramatically in favor of the user.” ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/02/22/study-faculty-members-skeptical-digital-course-materials-unfamiliar-oer>

A SELECTION OF BLOG POSTS

Confessions of a Community College Dean: OER and the Total Cost of Attendance

BY MATT REED // MAY 11, 2017

A not very secret plan.

We've all had colleagues who tended toward conspiracy theories. At a previous job, I pranked one once by leaving a folder on my desk labeled "My Top Secret Plans for World Domination, Part One." It was empty.

This is about as close as I get to real conspiring. But I've come up with a ... let's call it "plan" ... that might actually make a difference.

We don't have free community college yet in New Jersey. The original funding model was an even three-way split in costs among the state, the county, and the students; at this point, though, students pick up 57 percent of the cost, and their share is growing. Nobody wants to raise tuition, for obvious reasons, but it's also unrealistic to fund ever-more-expensive health insurance when every revenue stream is either



flat or declining. The math doesn't work. So there's a premium, no pun intended, on ways to find revenue that aren't so painful.

Some of those ways are the usual: philanthropy, public sector grants, space rental for conferences, summer camps. Improved retention and completion offer the prospect of greater tuition revenue without raising tuition, simply because more people would stick around longer. In business terms -- I know, but still -- a retained student is a repeat customer, and it's cheaper to retain a customer than to find a new one. Making that happen without spending significant money is a challenge.

But I'm thinking that an aggressive move toward OER could actually help generate revenue. Here's how.

Although tuition certainly matters to students, what matters more is "total cost of attendance." That includes fees, books, transportation, and the opportunity cost of taking classes, among other things. (Reduced work hours to make time for classes leads to reduced income in the short term, which is a cost. Over time, if they graduate, they more than make it back, but in the here and now, it's a cost.) Opportunity cost is lowest in recessions and highest during expansions, which is

The OER Moment

why our enrollments are countercyclical.

We don't control opportunity cost, and we have relatively little control over transportation. (We've made some headway with bus routes, but the basic point stands.) Tuition speaks for itself. Fees come in different flavors, ranging from course-specific ones to a general student fee. But books...

So here's the plan. If we get a critical mass of sections using OER, and we can quantify the typical savings to students in some sort of credible way, I'd like to go to the Board with the following argument:

If we raise tuition \$5 a credit, a stu-

dent taking 30 credits pays an extra \$150 a year. But if we're using OER in enough places that the student is saving \$500 a year on books, she's still coming out ahead. And the college is getting some much-needed revenue. The only loser here is the commercial textbook industry, which, frankly, isn't our problem.

In essence, it's a redirection and splitting of revenue. It directs revenue away from commercial publishers, and toward the college and the students. Students would have a lower total cost of attendance, and the college would gain more revenue. Over time, increased retention from having every student able to

get the books from day one would add another layer of revenue.

As conspiracies go, it's somewhat less enticing than most of the ones involving Elvis or the Trilateral Commission.

But it has the virtue of being both benign and practical. It could buy us some time until free community college comes along, and/or we get a health insurance policy that makes some sense.

It's not world domination, but that's okay. If it means students can learn because they have books and the college can teach because it has revenue, I'll call it good. Maybe I need a new folder... ■

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean/oer-and-total-cost-attendance>

Confessions of a Community College Dean: OER, Vertical and Horizontal

BY MATT REED // MAY 23, 2017

A different approach might yield more progress.

Why is there funding for the vertical development of OER, but not for horizontal?

OER refers to open educational resources, which are free alternatives to commercial instructional materials (such as textbooks). They're usually electronic, though it's commonplace to have printed copies available at nominal cost. As regular readers know, I'm a fan of OER. They remove the obstacle of textbook cost, thereby allowing professors to insist that every student have the course materials from the first day of class.

They aren't free to develop, of course. That's especially true in disciplines like math, where the textbook also needs to come with homework assignments, quizzes and the like. Instructors need time to wade through the thickets of material to find (or build on, or help develop) the best stuff for what they're teaching. Over the long term, it can pay off in vastly improved student success, but there is a short-term



cost. It's the sort of thing for which grants are ideal: smallish, non-recurring upfront cost, followed by long-term benefit. It's a textbook case, no pun intended, of when the concept of "seed money" actually makes sense.

But the OER grants out there tend to reward "vertical" development, rather than horizontal. And that's not necessarily the best way to go.

By vertical, I'm referring to an entire degree path. Tidewater Community College's "z-degree" in business administration is the exemplar. Every class that students take in the program uses all OER, including the Gen Ed classes. That means they got folks from English, math, the social sciences, and the rest to sign on.

I admire what they've been able to do, but in the short run, it's not

practical for many places. If I have to get every department across the Gen Ed field to sign up, it could take years. And in the meantime, students would continue either paying money they don't have, or simply not buying books and having their performance suffer.

Horizontal development focuses instead on some high-enrollment classes first, leaving the specialized stuff for later. Instead of picking one degree program (or a few), you pick the high-enrollment courses in which you have willing faculty, and go from there.

Horizontal development offers some real advantages. It's politically easier, because it's voluntary. But it also reaches more students sooner. If you knock out, say, 5 of the top 10 enrolled gen ed classes, chances are good that the vast majority

of the students at the college will get an OER class, if not several. Students talk to each other, and to faculty; over time, some who've had a few OER classes might ask their

other professors why they aren't using it. It's one thing to reject an idea from a vice president, but it's much harder to reject it from your own students. Assuming critical mass upfront, a viral transmission model can take effect. That has the advantage of long-term sustainability.

“

Horizontal development focuses instead on some high-enrollment classes first, leaving the specialized stuff for later. Instead of picking one degree program (or a few), you pick the high-enrollment courses in which you have willing faculty, and go from there.

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In my perfect world, the folks who do grants for OER would recognize both models, and support both. I've got thousands of students paying three figures per textbook (or not buying them at all) when they could be going with OER. Yes, it's sometimes possible to use some

So, a hint to the folks doing grants. Vertical development is great, and I'm all for it, when it's possible. But don't leave out horizontal development. We could make a real difference for an amazing number of students quickly, just by that one change. ■

internal money, but community college budgets tend to be tight. This is exactly the sort of thing for which grants are ideally suited.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean/oer-vertical-and-horizontal>

Higher Ed Gamma: A New Value Proposition for Open Textbooks

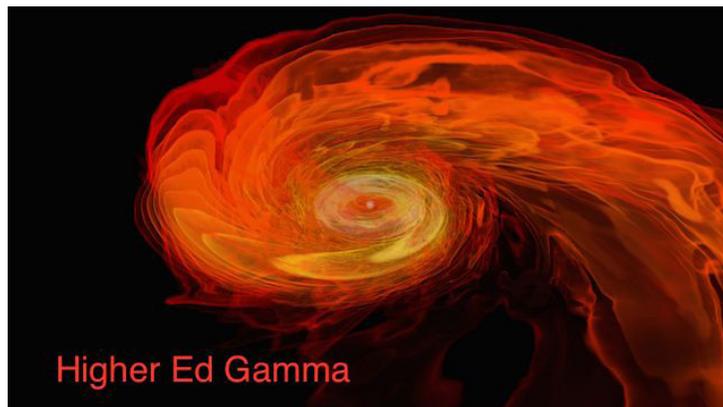
BY THOMAS CAREY // APRIL 24, 2017

Engaging students with knowledge practices?

Two recent events have highlighted advances in the adoption of open educational resources: the announcement from New York State about a new [statewide Open Textbook investment and a new partnership](#) to “bring open course content to faculty members through the campus bookstore.”

Welcome as these new announcements are, and as much as we hope they represent a breakthrough on OER adoption... we’ve been predicting an imminent ‘tipping point’ for Open Educational Resources usage long enough to be a bit cautious. IHE’s [Inside Digital Learning](#) summarized last week how some of folks involved in OER for a long time viewed these developments, and these expert opinions reflected a diverse range of viewpoints in both the short and long term.

I’d like to expand on my two-paragraphs of quick opinion in that article, by exploring how an overlooked value proposition for Open Text-



books that could help us reach that elusive tipping point. If we use Open Textbooks and other OER to make visible the way faculty work with knowledge in our teaching, can that help us to model for our students how they will need to engage with knowledge practices in their own careers (and in their other roles as community members and global citizens)?

Building Capability in Creating Knowledge

We know we need to prepare students for a future in which they will work with knowledge that doesn’t

yet exist, using knowledge practices that don’t exist, in jobs that don’t yet exist. Building capability for such a dynamic knowledge environment includes a conceptual perspective on knowledge as evolving rather than fixed, a skill set for extending knowledge and knowledge practices in innovative ways, and above all a sense of agency and self-efficacy for this kind of knowledge-building as part of contemporary professional and vocational workloads. Some researchers are framing this kind of capability as ‘the [Deliberate Practitioner](#)’, encompassing the more

familiar ‘[Reflective Practitioner](#)’ goal but with a much stronger forward-looking view of practice (rather than just reflecting in retrospect).

With this goal in mind, we believe an open textbook can become more than an exposition of the subject matter content – it can also be a demonstration of the process by which the pedagogical content knowledge has evolved over time within the professional community. That process demonstrates how the knowledge can be – and must be – adapted for particular contexts, how new research evidence can be applied to improve outcomes, and reveal instructional challenges that remain as open questions being actively addressed.

How Open Textbooks Could Add Value

I’m not suggesting that every student using an open textbook within a course – in Math or History or Psychology – is going to be keen to drill down into this process view of the knowledge captured in the text: their primary focus is going to be on applying the content knowledge to the learning tasks assigned in the content area.

But if we are serious about developing the graduate attributes that are common across all disciplines, we’ll already have some sort of parallel curricular structure to motivate and support students in using sub-

ject-specific course assignments to develop and demonstrate their generic outcomes.

A good example is the way the University of Central Oklahoma asks instructors to [tag one assignment](#) in each course where the grading of course-specific work will include an indication of competency demonstration on one of the “[Central Six](#)” attributes that cross all programs. That structure also provides students with a navigation path to documenting capability in these



If we use Open Textbooks and other OER to make visible the way faculty work with knowledge in our teaching, can that help us to model for our students how they will need to engage with knowledge practices in their own careers?



common attributes within their co-curricular transcript, the [Student Transformative Learning Record](#).

Now imagine a scenario in which our “Central Seven” includes a graduate attribute for capability in [Practice Improvement](#), [Knowledge-Building](#) or [Workplace Innovation](#). If we wanted to tag an assignment in a Math, History of Psychology course where students could get a start on this capability, an open textbook could serve as a meaningful reflection resource by illustrating how the information they are applying in one of their assignments has been built up by the professional community – especially if their instructor was involved in the process and can

schedule some extra time to share personal experiences with interested students as part of their co-curricular set of [digital badges or credentials](#).

That’s only a first level of competency and agency. A next step might be participating with a faculty member in [Students as Partners in Teaching & Learning](#) activities to enhance enhancing the open resources, where the results are included in the open network of educational resources as an exemplary [non-disposable assignment](#) (preferably with tracking of re-use beyond the original context as further demonstration of the legacy value from the students’ contribution). To best

frame this accomplishment as a transferable capability with impact in other workplaces, I’d also suggest labeling such activities more along the lines of [Students as Partners in Knowledge, Learning and Innovation](#) (“SPARKLIN”) teams.

The Business Case for Open Textbooks

This meta-capability for *knowledge practice work* is emerging as a key graduate attribute for our students, and one where open textbooks could play a critical role. The business case for open textbooks – or, more accurately, Open Innovation Networks in Educational Resources – would then go beyond a quantitative argument around cost

The OER Moment

savings to a qualitative advantage in enabling innovative student outcomes.

We'd need some new infrastructure to manage such knowledge spaces, of course. It's more than just an index of changes, such as the several dozen adaptations, customizations and extensions that faculty have created for some of

our OER classics (e.g., [Collaborative Statistics](#)).

The design rationale and knowledge advance in each change would need more explanation for students to relate it to their experiences in using the text and to their future experiences as knowledge adaptors and creators in the workplace.

And let's not forget that there are

other ways we can support student development of skills and agency in knowledge practice work.

For example, they can use [their own work of learning in our 'workplace'](#) of teaching and learning as a testbed for improving their own practices by adapting exemplary learning practices and applying research evidence about learning. ■

[Thomas Carey](#) works with higher education leaders on institutional strategy for teaching and learning. He is Executive-in-Residence at the [British Columbia Association of Institutes and Universities](#), Research Professor at [San Diego State University](#), and Visiting Scholar at the University of Queensland's [Institute for Teaching & Learning Innovation](#). My thanks to the [University of the Fraser Valley's](#) pilot study team on developing student capability for mobilizing and creating knowledge in the workplace.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/new-value-proposition-open-textbooks-0>

Higher Ed Gamma: What a Difference Five Years Makes

BY STEVEN MINTZ // APRIL 5, 2017

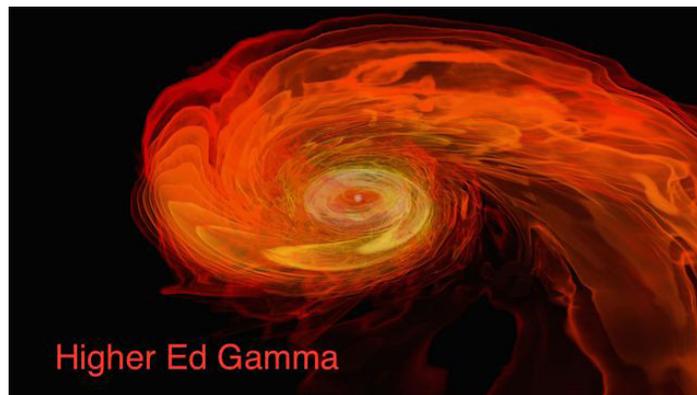
Real change in higher ed.

Just five years ago, higher education as we knew it appeared headed toward a precipice.

MOOCs from Stanford, MIT and Harvard held out the prospect of a handful of institutions providing “the best courses from the top professors” to students across the world for free. Meanwhile, for-profit universities – with little competition from existing brick and mortar institutions – were tapping the most rapidly growing segments of the student population: the working adults, family caregivers, and low-income students who were seeking marketable skills.

Radical innovation was in the air, as transformational educational models – like Minerva’s or the University of the People’s or the University of North Texas Dallas’s (with a non-tenured, non-research-oriented faculty offering a narrow range of career-aligned majors) – sprang up.

Five years later, MOOCs [continue to grow](#) and, for the first time, generate a significant amount of revenue. 58 million students registered for



MOOCs in 2016, 23 million for the first time, and, thanks to revenue resulting from pay walls, course and platform fees, and paid access to certificates, instructors, and student support, earned an estimated \$100 million. At the same time, [for-profit institutions](#) enrolled nearly 3 million of the more than 19 million college students in the United States.

Nevertheless, higher education’s existential crisis was over. The most radical forces for disruption had faded. MOOCs and various transformational models failed to attract substantial numbers of undergraduates. For-profits’ enrollment rapidly fell under pressure from govern-

ment regulators. Use of interactive courseware, like OLI’s, and even OER seemingly stalled. Free and low-cost options, like ASU’s Global Freshman Academy, failed to find a substantial audience.

Still, the higher education ecosystem had undergone a sea change. At the broad access institutions that serve the overwhelming majority of students, an unprecedented focus on student success, both in terms of academic and post-graduation outcomes, educational equity, and affordability arose, along with an unparalleled willingness to rethink existing ways of doing business.

Institutions began to test new

curricular pathways that were simpler and more transparent, coherent, and intentionally designed; novel pedagogies informed by the science of learning;

innovative delivery modes that emphasized flexibility; and state-of-the-art student services that were robust, proactive, and data-driven. Ferment and a willingness to think outside of traditional boxes were in the air, as institutions and foundations explored fresh approaches to assessment, credentialing, and transcribing.

A series of forces – demographic, behavioral, financial, and political – had combined to drive these transformations. Many more non-traditional students, often the graduates of underperforming high schools, enrolled in colleges and universities, and too few ever earned a degree. Many more students acquired credits from multiple institutions, including high schools, threatening lower division enrollment and existing business models.

As per student, inflation-adjusted public funding stagnated or even declined, institutions suddenly realized that their financial sustainability now hinged upon their retention and graduation rates, prompting many to turn to vendors – like EAB or Civitas Learning – that promised to help out.

Perhaps most importantly, the

“ Costs... continue to rise above the inflation rate and neither public investment, revenue from continuing education, nor philanthropy or grants and contracts are able to make up the difference. ”

political context had shifted. In the wake of the Great Recession, concern about student debt, attainment gaps, graduation rates, and learning and employment outcomes greatly intensified.

Although the threat of radical disruption abated, there was no reason to think that higher education has achieved a new steady state. Costs – for instruction, financial aid, technology, support services, compliance with federal and state laws and regulations, and facilities – continue to rise above the inflation rate and neither public investment, revenue from continuing education, nor philanthropy or grants and contracts are able to make up the difference.

Enrollment trends, too, pose severe challenges, as the proportion of students requiring financial aid, remediation, and wrap-around supports increases and as institutions in areas with declining numbers of high school graduates compete aggressively for students.

Public policy – including performance-based funding, demands that institutions make credit transfer more seamless, and mandates that programs identify the market-

able skills their students acquire – presents additional challenges. So, too, does competition from a new breed of alternate providers, including coding

boot camps and low-cost competency-based programs like Western Governors University.

In the meantime, standards for a high-quality education continue to rise.

There is a widespread sense that student access to experiential learning and high impact pedagogies – including mentored research, internships, service learning opportunities, and study abroad – should increase. A quality education, many believe, needs to be immersive, activity-focused, well-supported, and technology-enhanced, featuring advanced simulations, maker spaces, and expanded interactions with faculty.

Providing such a rich educational experience at a time when institutions are under extreme financial pressure will not be easy. What is clear is that business as usual is not an option.

The “artisanal” approach to course development, in which individual faculty members create all their courses wholly on their own, without any assistance from instructional designers, technologists, and assessment experts, will decline. So, too, will traditional lecture courses.

The OER Moment

Fewer faculty, I suspect, will be able to decide, largely on their own, what and when to teach.

Faculty members, especially those in the humanities, are likely to be tasked with placing much more emphasis on developing their students' "21st century literacies" and soft skills.

Yet at the same time faculty will

have expanded opportunities to architect much more meaningful learning experiences, work collaboratively with colleagues from other departments to design learning pathways, engage in rigorous research on student learning, and devote their time and energies to student mentoring.

Historical change always involves

trade-offs. If higher education is to serve as society's primary vehicle for social mobility, if our broad access institutions are going to successfully address society's class divide, we need to view this brave new world not as a declension from a mythical golden age, but as an exciting opportunity for innovation and transformation. ■

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<https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/what-difference-five-years-make>

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