OA & OER: A Small College Library's Plan to Promote Open Access to Its Faculty

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Abstract

In 2010, librarians at the Olin Library at Rollins College began promoting open access to faculty members initially by creating an institutional repository and subsequently by developing an Open Education Resource (OER) grant. The grant awards a stipend to a faculty member who proposes to adopt OER resources in a course and explains the benefits to student learning by using these resources. The intention of the grant is to continue developing awareness about OER to our faculty members with the goal to reduce textbook costs to students. This article discusses one grant project awarded to a political science professor and what the liaison librarian learned during the process.

Keywords: OER; Open Access; liberal arts college; academic library

Introduction

What do an art historian, a political scientist, and an ethnomusicologist have in common? At the Olin Library at Rollins College these professors were awarded Open Educational Resources (OER) grants during the first years of the grant program. The program began in 2015 was funded by the library and aimed to reduce the costs of course materials for Rollins students. However, the OER grant was part of a larger initiative to generate interest and encourage faculty to think about open access materials and how these resources can meet their course objectives and student learning needs. This article discusses how a small private college library created an OER grant program for faculty members to develop awareness about open educational resources. It analyzes the process and outcomes of one grant awarded to a political science professor.

The proliferation of information has provided professors with access to content in new formats which they can incorporate into their instruction to enhance student learning. Videos, podcasts, blogs, and data visualizations are some examples of such new information formats (Xu, 2018, p. 85). These new technologies can present information in innovative ways to complement course lectures and class discussions and they help reinforce concepts or explain ideas (Weis, Benmayor, O'Leary, & Eynon, 2002, p. 154). However, faculty can find it challenging to seamlessly integrate these new formats and materials into their instruction because of campus access, login requirements or the lack of permanent links provided with the resource (McGee & Diaz, 2007, 32).

Despite the extensive availability of freely available electronic resources, professors continue to require that students purchase course materials. According to the report "Trends in College Pricing 2019," undergraduate students budgeted, on average, between $1200 - $1400 for course materials and supplies (CollegeBoard, 2019). These costs have risen annually. The

Consumer Price Index reported a 181 percent increase in the cost of college textbooks from 1998 – 2016 (Perry, 2016). At California State University, Northbridge (CSUN), a student survey conducted by two librarians revealed more than half of the respondents indicated they only purchase all the textbooks for their courses about 75% of the time (Bourhard & Magnuson, 2017, p. 4). In the same CSUN survey, a majority of student respondents, 77% of the 477 responses, stated the reason for not buying textbooks for a course was because of the high cost. In the current debate of the rising price tag of higher education, textbook affordability is a growing concern among college students and their families.

Libraries have framed the conversation and the need to provide students with open education resources around affordability (West, 2016, p. 1438). Open education resources are pedagogical materials that are available in the public domain and can be reused, revised, repurposed, and redistributed. Such resources include textbooks, readings, assignments, tests, projects, etc. to help promote learning inside and outside the classroom and are in the public domain or have open licensing (UNESCO, 2019). Many libraries continue to provide course reserves as a way to help defray book costs for students. Students borrow print course materials from the library placed on reserve by the faculty member. However, students have limited time to use reserve material and often only one print copy of the course material is available for students to access (Seaman, 2008, 20). Faculty members have adopted electronic reserves and use the campus course management system to provide student access to course materials. These materials are restricted to only students enrolled in that course and are typically under copyright (thus having limited access).

Fortunately, students do have options when it comes to obtaining course textbooks. Campus bookstores and online vendors, such as Amazon, provide rental textbooks which can

cost less than purchasing the materials. In other instances, textbook publishers have included workbooks, CDs, and exams, increasing the cost and requiring students to purchase rather than rent these materials (Okamoto, 2013, p. 268). Creating or adopting open education resources (OER) for a course can reduce students' expenses and reduce overall costs they incur. In 2018, the Student Public Interest Research Groups (Student PIRGS) investigated textbook costs for the top ten courses at 40 colleges and universities. In their study, the organization selected the ten courses with the highest enrollment and reviewed course materials for these courses. It revealed that for these ten courses students could save approximately $13 million if the courses switched to OER (Student PIRGs, 2018, p. 8).

The challenge for college libraries regarding OER adoption on campuses has been educating faculty colleagues about these resources and the benefits of using them. At California State University San Marcos, librarians surveyed faculty members, tenure track and adjunct, to learn more about their interest and awareness about free online scholarly materials. A majority of the respondents, 70%, were interested in using free or low-cost materials in their courses (Mitchell & Chu, 2017, p. 18). A report published by the Babson Survey Research Group in 2014 indicated that faculty members were uninformed about open educational resources which prevented many of them from adopting them in their courses (Doan, 2017, p. 665). Librarians can fill this gap in faculty knowledge.

Librarians and OER

As respected information providers, academic librarians are well positioned to inform and promote OER on campus. Libraries at larger research institutions have created OER programs to educate and encourage faculty members to adopt affordable course material options. A conducted by the Association of Research Libraries, a national organization of libraries at major

public and private higher education institutions, revealed that 37% of its members offer a form of an OER program to faculty at their institution (Thomas & Bernhardt, 2018, p. 258). However, OER initiatives are not limited to large university libraries.

At Rollins College, the process to develop awareness about OER among faculty members included multiple elements. In 2010 the library director was in conversations with faculty colleagues about adopting an Open Access (OA) policy at the college. Other peer institutions, Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas and Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, had previously adopted an OA policy which strengthened the proposed policy at Rollins College (Miller, 2011, p. 16). Rollins OA policy stipulates that to encourage readership and distribute faculty scholarship to a wider audience, professors will submit to the institutional repository the final post print version of their article that has been accepted for publication. The policy also limits scholarly works to only those that do not receive any royalty payments or have incompatible licensing agreements prior to its adoption. In addition, the proposed policy secured support from several key faculty members who advocated for its adoption among their colleagues. The OA policy passed with unanimous support by the College of Arts and Science faculty members and subsequently by the Crummer Business School, the graduate business school at Rollins College.

Concurrently, the library began hosting an institutional repository for faculty members to submit their works. As Miller (2011) states, creating the repository alongside the OA policy demonstrates to faculty "how their works will be archived and accessed." (p. 18). The creation and maintenance of an institutional repository gives faculty members a dedicated place to retain copies of scholarly works published in academic journals and similar materials but can also serve as a space to host original content produced at the institution (Mitchell & Chu, 2014, p. 15). The enactment of the OA policy and the creation of RSO, Rollins Scholarship Online, the

institutional repository, informed the faculty of the types of resources openly available which would be readily accessible in full text for users, including their students and other researchers, to access. However, to move the college's faculty from Open Access to OER adoption required further encouragement.

Academic librarians promote library services and resources on campus to not only develop knowledge creation among students and faculty but to also help disseminate that new knowledge. They foster and curate the library collection to support the learning initiatives of the institution. Librarians teach students about locating resources and materials, either provided by the library, or on the open web, for them to use in their research. They also suggest new resources to professors to enhance their teaching or inform their research. As recognized information specialists on their campus, librarians are poised to be ambassadors for OER. At large research institutions, much progress has been made on the part of libraries to promote OER. Libraries at Virginia Tech, UCLA, and University of Massachusetts-Amherst have been leaders in designing programs and incentives to encourage open resource adoption by faculty at their institutions (Salem Jr., 2017, p. 36). In Louisiana, the Affordable Learning LOUISiana OER repository, gives both public and private institutions the means to contribute scholarly content as well as provide faculty members access to these resources to use in their courses.

OER incentives, such as grants, are ways to promote Open Access and encourage faculty colleagues to include and develop OER in their courses and in their research. These incentives can also foster positive faculty-librarian relationships on campus. At small college campuses, the personal attention students receive from the faculty and the campus community is a high expectation (Mitchell, Comer, Starkey, & Francis, 2011, p. 367). These personal relationships should also extend to the faculty-librarian relationship especially when new programs are created

and need to be promoted on campus. In fact, it is imperative for librarians at liberal arts colleges to "initiate programs that effectively introduce all faculty to the resources and capabilities of libraries" (Stueart, 1990, p. 525). An OER initiative can serve as a way for librarians to inform and collaborate with faculty on campus.

However, participation in OER activity varies widely among liberal arts colleges. A 2012 National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education (NITLE) survey of member schools about open education reported that 30.4% of respondents determined that their college's extent of engagement with open education was "doing nothing at present" while 30.4% indicated that they are studying "potential approaches" (Spiro & Alexander, 2012, p. 18). When asked about how to improve open education on their campus, 50% of respondents indicated "grant funding in support of education" (Spiro & Alexander, 2012, p. 20). At Gettysburg College, the library created an OER grant program which awards a sizable amount of money to a faculty member to incorporate OER materials into a course (Barnes, 2018, p. 5). At Furman University, another small private liberal arts institution, the library created an Open Access Fund to alleviate the cost of Article Processing Charges (APCs) which professors may incur when seeking out new publishing options.

Following the approval of the OA policy and the introduction of RSO, librarians at the Olin Library wanted to further engage with faculty about open education opportunities. Olin librarians are members of the faculty and work to be actively involved in student learning at Rollins College. They teach information literacy instruction sessions for faculty in assigned departments and are in regular conversations with faculty colleagues about library resources and services. The library director at the time proposed creating an OER grant program to demonstrate to faculty the library's commitment to Open Access and to expand the librarian's

collaboration with faculty to use and develop these resources in their courses.

OER Grant Process at Rollins College

As the library liaison to the political science department, the author collaborated with a professor to submit an OER grant for her political theory course. The course is a requirement for all political science majors and is an elective for minors. The major requirement made it an optimal class for grant consideration since the course is offered every semester and has consistently high enrollment. The combination of enrollment and instruction frequency contributed to the OER grant's strength since a large number of students would benefit from the objectives of the grant. Both the professor and librarian discussed the strength of her grant proposal in a pre-grant meeting which is highly recommended to do and is a question on the grant application. Course readings for the political theory course include historical texts written by classic philosophers including John Locke, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, and Plato. These works are available in the public domain and therefore no longer protected by copyright. Although the professor did request for the texts to be available for purchase at the campus bookstore, students had the option and freedom to purchase them from other vendors such as Amazon or from used bookstores. Students could also find the texts on the internet and read the digital version. Although students were able to find the texts free of charge many still purchased the books.

The freedom to choose the format and the variety of versions available of the course readings produced unexpected challenges in the course such as ensuring students knew which parts of the text to read and the ability to refer to and discuss specific passages during class sessions. Since students used different versions of the text and different formats, the professor found it difficult to manage the class within the context of course readings. She wanted to

facilitate students' electronic access to all course materials. In her grant, she proposed that providing the texts in one space in the same format would enhance students' ability to complete the reading assignments and their engagement in the course.

The OER grant at Rollins College is open to all faculty members regardless of their contract status: tenured, tenure-track, adjunct, and lecturers. In the online application professors indicate the course name and number, average number of students enrolled, and discuss how the grant would help solve content issues for the students in the course. Professors must also discuss possible assessment mechanisms they plan to incorporate in their course to determine outcomes and student learning. The grant recipient is awarded a $3,000 stipend which is disbursed over three years, $1,000 per year or three iterations of the same course. The purpose of extending the grant over several years rather than a single year is to provide the professor with time to incorporate OER materials into the course. The first year of the grant, the professor teaches primarily with the traditional course materials while also researching OER materials that could be included. In the second year, or second iteration of the course, the professor uses OER materials as much as possible with the goal of having approximately half of the course content available as OER. The final year or third iteration of the grant, the goal is to have the entire body of course content be OER. Throughout the three year process, the professor monitors student assessment and adjusts the course as needed to ensure student learning needs and course objectives are being met. Following the third year of the grant, the grant team presents their project to the campus community.

Submitted grants are reviewed by the Head of Instructional Technology, the library liaison assigned to the professor's department and the library director. The group awards the grant based on projected textbook cost savings to students and how the professor will assess

student learning using OER materials. Prior to submitting the grant, the professor is expected to consult with the library liaison and an instructional technologist about their application and obtain feedback before submission. The professor awarded an OER grant is assigned a librarian and an instructional technologist to help realize the outcomes of the grant proposal. In addition, the director of teaching and learning collaborated with the team to provide pedagogical advice on the project.

For this grant, the librarian researched public domain sites that provided free access to the classical texts that students could easily download. The instructional technologist navigated what available technology would be needed to facilitate students using the texts. Together the grant colleagues tested and retested the two components: electronic versions of the texts and the technology in order to determine the best way for students to access and use the texts. Both of them remained mindful of the different types of computers students would use in class as well as the respective operating systems. In addition, they were interested to discover what technical features might be available for students to use with the texts that would enhance the learning experience.

As stated earlier, the texts for this class are in the public domain and available on the internet for students to access. The librarian recommended accessing the text via Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page, since the website provides multiple formats for students to download. Working collaboratively, the librarian and the instructional technologist found the .epub version to be the most useful and offer the best features. The .epub version requires users to download the free software Adobe Digital Editions which works with multiple operating systems. Furthermore, Adobe Digital Editions offers various features which the team thought would enhance student learning. For both PC and Apple computers, students

can highlight text, add notes, bookmark pages, and increase or decrease font size. In collaboration with the professor, both the librarian and the instructional technologist scheduled a hands-on session during the first week of class to help the students locate and download the texts to their devices. In the most recent instruction workshop, the grant colleagues noticed more variety in the kinds of device students used in class. One student used a Chromebook and another had an Android tablet. At that time, these devices could not download Adobe Digital Editions which limited these students' access to the features provided by the software.

Student Feedback About OER

At the conclusion of each course, the professor distributed an optional online survey to students about the course materials. Survey questions asked about the students' overall course material/textbook purchasing habits and their opinion about the quality of free educational materials. In the second and third survey iterations, questions were included that specifically asked students about using the open education materials in this course since the professor used OER materials more purposefully. For the first survey, pre-OER, 14 students of the 18 enrolled in the course responded, 11 of 12 students responded to the second survey, and 16 of 18 students responded to the third survey iteration. We were pleased with the strong survey response rate.

Student responses regarding textbook purchases mirrored the national conversation around textbook affordability. In all three surveys, at least 50% of respondents said they have delayed purchasing a textbook because of cost and in one survey, 60% of the students said they did not purchase a textbook for a class because of cost. When asked their opinion about the quality of open education materials, the majority of student respondents in all three surveys found them to be about the same in comparison to traditional textbooks. A few respondents did find OER to be slightly worse and these students did indicate a preference to read print text

which may have made their learning experience less than ideal. In the final survey iteration, the majority of students, almost 90%, accessed the required texts digitally. A subsequent question asked the students who used the digital versions of the text about the features available in Adobe Digital Editions. More than 60% of respondents answered "Always" or "Very Frequently" to using the highlight feature (Sugar, 2018). However, only 40% said they used digital notes. Student respondents who took notes were evenly divided on their preference - half indicated they took handwritten notes and the other half took notes outside of the text, perhaps in another electronic document.

The professor did provide anecdotal evidence about the students in her class and their use of OER materials in their learning. Students did share their appreciation and the freedom to not have to buy books for the class. However, she did notice a fair number of students still preferred to use the print versions to read course material. According to the survey results, some of the students who used the digital copies indicated they were comfortable reading electronic format because they had been reading this format since high school. Those students who used the digital version also said they liked having the search function which helped them navigate the text easily and locate information effectively. That accessibility contributed to a positive learning experience.

This OER grant officially ended at the conclusion of the spring 2018 semester. The results seemed mixed with respect to students using the open resources, their preference for print or electronic, and the ease of use when using technology to access the content. The team is now investigating ways to create an open textbook with these course readings for the class. Currently, students have to download each text individually which although not particularly challenging, can be cumbersome. By creating an open textbook that is accessible on different

platforms that includes features such as highlighting or creating bookmarks, would contribute to grant's goal to reduce students' college expenses and improve student engagement. Furthermore, the open textbook would be made available for students in similar courses at other institutions and further demonstrate the institution's commitment to OER.

At the Olin Library at Rollins College, librarians have focused their efforts to promote open education resources to the faculty. The library director, at this time, was dedicated to enhancing the library's open access content as well as educating faculty colleagues about open access and encouraging them to create and contribute open access content. Two initiatives that formed as a result were the institutional repository, Rollins Scholarship Online (RSO), and the Open Education Resource grant. These have required significant buy-in from faculty outside the library along with ongoing outreach by the librarians to promote and support them.

Academic libraries are valued information providers on college campuses and have adapted their collections to better serve the growing expectation for electronic access. Libraries also embrace the value of sharing information and making content available to help improve knowledge and learning. The Open Access initiative at Rollins College has expanded beyond scholarly works authored by professors. The library has added digitized the college's literary journal *Brushing*, an annual publication that includes creative works in various formats authored by students and faculty as well as submissions from local writers to the college's repository. In addition, the repository provides access to articles co-authored by faculty and students. These works are a result of the college's Student-Faculty Collaborative Research program conducted during the summer months. Their inclusion demonstrates to students the value of open access and provides a space for unique works created by members of the Rollins community.

The OER grant program is still in its early stages. In 2019, the Olin Library did not

award a grant due to the low interest and a lack of qualified applications. The grant was temporarily suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 campus closure. The initiative requires continuous communication with faculty colleagues in academic departments along with the collective effort of librarians to promote it. More engagement with faculty in Science and Business programs is necessary since these departments have high student enrollment. A course in one of these subjects that switches to OER content could create substantial cost savings for its students.

However, as part of the larger initiative to develop awareness about open access on our campus, the OER grant has contributed to saving money for students in art history, music, and political science. In the case of the political theory course discussed in this article, the OER grant made the required texts more affordable for students but also integrated technology tools to enhance their learning. Olin librarians intend to continue promoting open access and the OER grant program to the Rollins College community with the goal to make course materials and textbooks more affordable and demonstrate their commitment to Open Access.

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