

Title: Transitioning a Large Core Course Program to OER to Increase Equity at Minority-Serving Institutions

Facilitator: Dr. Jackie Hoermann-Elliott, Texas Woman's University

Format: Workshop

Theme I: Pedagogy, Andragogy, and Designs

Theme II: Professional Development

Workshop Agenda

Time Estimate	Activity
0-5 minutes	Welcome, Overview, and Participant Introductions in Chat
5-15 minutes	Facilitator Background and Narrative
15-25 minutes	Programmatic SWOT Analysis Activity
25-40 minutes	Group Discussion of SWOT Analyses
40-50 minutes	Next Steps for Implementation
50-60 minutes	Q&A Time

Welcome, Overview, and Participant Introductions in Chat

- The facilitator will begin by welcoming everyone to the session, giving an overview of the agenda for the workshop.
- The facilitator will then use a waterfall questioning method to invite participants to provide relevant personal and institutional information, describe their interests, and generally build community in the chat.

Facilitator Background and Narrative

- The facilitator will give a brief overview of her credentials.
- The facilitator will read from the following narrative, while improvising with descriptions on a visual aid:

From Consideration to Commitment

Last spring, I joined a campus mentoring cohort that paid a generous stipend to consider the possibility of integrating open educational resources (OER) into all of our first-year composition (FYC) courses at Texas Woman's University (TWU). At first, my interest in the available OER was sincere but, to be honest, non-committal. I was not about to release a perfectly good textbook that accommodated our program curriculum to take this next uncertain step into the world of OER-based teaching resources. With great hesitation, I entertained the idea of making the switch, but I labored for months over questions, such as:

How could there really be enough available OER to meet the needs of our student writers? Our unique curriculum?

How might the transition detract from the learning experiences of our students?

How might this hurt the credibility of our program in the eyes of my colleagues?

And then, as the economic impact of the pandemic gripped all of the American higher education system and the Black Lives Matter Movement exposed the gross inequities students of color face on a daily basis, I felt I had no choice. It was time to make the switch to OER. In this article, I present persuasive research on OER's effectiveness in terms of student performance before making recommendations to support faculty interested in partially or fully adopting OER.

Context and Research

As a minority-serving institution where forty-four percent of students are Pell Grant eligible, TWU students benefit tremendously from the cost savings that OER can offer them. The collective savings to all students enrolled in our first- or second-semester sequence courses averages out to \$197,000 annually. This means that in the last five or so years that we have been using our textbook, our FYC students have spent nearly one million dollars on textbooks for our courses. Beyond saving money, there's relatively recent data to show that eliminating textbook costs can improve student performance. In 2018, a study of over 21,000 students at the University of Georgia found that OER improved end-of-course grades and decreased D, F, W grades for all students, particularly the Pell eligible students (Colvard 2018). These findings, initially shared with me by TWU Digital Services Librarian Amanda Zerangue, who mentored me through my transition to OER, gave me enough persuasive data to make the case for OER as a means to increasing student performance and possibly retention, but it only tells part of the story.

The second author listed on the aforementioned study was one I re-encountered a few months later when I heard him speaking on an episode of *Teaching in Higher Education* podcast. In episode 186: “Assessing the Impact of Open Educational Resources,” C. Edward Watson anecdotally suggested that in addition to cost savings, students enrolled in OER-adopting courses have the opportunity to start the semester on a slightly more equal playing field with their peers who can afford course textbooks (Stachowiak 2018). As teachers, we are all too familiar with the fact that some students come prepared with their books in hand from day one and some don’t. Some students wait at the mercy of financial aid before they can purchase all of their books, and some have no financial aid or extra income to make these critical purchases. Also in support of Watson’s claim is a study on OER from The Open University in the United Kingdom, in which researchers used student focus groups to determine that OER implementation led to “increased confidence, satisfaction and enthusiasm for the subject” (Farrow et al. 2015). Moreover, a meta-analysis of sixteen studies examining the effects of OER on student learning found that “students generally achieve the same learning outcomes when OER are utilized and simultaneously save significant amounts of money” while faculty perceptions of OER remain “generally positive” (Hilton 2016).

With some questions answered, my program assistant and I dove headlong into a long curricular revamping process that summer, overhauling our textbook-based reading schedules with new OER alternatives. With renewed interest and an exigent purpose driving our efforts, we spent weeks scouring our team-built resource repository initiated by our digital services librarian partner, and we found ourselves bookmarking new resources for future use. The OER-based reading and resource schedule we created was presented to our twenty-nine instructors for full implementation at the start of that fall, and the feedback—while not completely perfect—has been overwhelmingly positive.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Faculty perceptions of OER have been positive for quite some time, too, as reported by *Faculty Focus* in 2016, and yet the uptake of OER feels somewhat sluggish (Bart). My purpose in this final section is to pull back the curtain on my OER implementation process with several recommendations that might benefit others, who, like me, may be feeling sincerely interested but noncommittal.

Find advocates. I was fortunate to be part of a cohort that assisted me with my research into OER, but I recognize that most faculty will not have a librarian beckoning to support them. If you need an advocate to get started, seek out campus librarians who may have a background in OER or know other faculty members who have already made the transition to OER. Likewise, you can ask your university’s teaching and learning center staff for a connection that might support you.

Make spreadsheets. Our bespoke curriculum made it so that one OER textbook was not going to be everything our students needed, but we identified several suitable alternatives. We created a spreadsheet of OER-based resource links by

category of learning, so that when the time came to choose readings and content we needed, we could offer multiple relevant options to our students and our instructors.

File away. As it happens sometimes, OER links can be taken offline for various reasons. To prepare for this, our program's senior secretary made PDF files of each reading so we could send those readings to instructors at a moment's notice.

Survey users. Different OER embrace different instructional design approaches, some that may appeal to students more than instructors and vice versa. Consider showing students two or more similar resources and ask them which they prefer and why.

Start small. If you remain unsure about whether or not transitioning to OER is right for you, plan for small first forays into OER. Plan one unit of learning or just one week of learning using OER reads and resources. Take notes reflecting on the experience so that you have a written record to return to when the question of OER implementation comes up again.

My writing program made the switch to OER because, as shared earlier, economic hardships and social inequities compelled me to push past the questions that gave me pedagogical pause. Though now may not be the best time for some faculty members to weigh their uncertainties against the financial needs and academic performance considerations of their students, I write in hope that the experiences I've shared will move the needle forward for a few more faculty members who have been sitting at an OER impasse. There has never been a better time to go all in on OER or a better way to serve our students.

Bibliography

- Bart, Mary. "Survey highlights growth of video in higher ed, optimism over OER." *Faculty Focus*, (2016): <https://www.facultyfocus.com/uncategorized/annual-survey-highlights-growing-use-video-higher-education-optimism-oer/>
- Colvard, Nicholas B., Watson, C. Edward, & Park, Hyojin. "The impact of open educational resources on various student success metrics." *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 30, no. 2 (2018): 262-276. doi: <https://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/>
- Farrow, Robert, Pitt, Rebecca, de los Arcos, Beatriz, Perryman, Leigh-Anne, Weller, Martin, & McAndrew, Patrick. "Impact of OER use on teaching and learning: Data from OER Research Hub (2013-2014)." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 46, no. 5 (2015): 972-976. doi: 10.1111/bjet.12310
- Hilton, J. "Open educational resources and college textbook choices: A review of research on efficacy and perceptions." *Education Technology Research and*

Development 64 (2016): 573–590. doi:
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-016-9434-9>

Stachowiak, Bonnie. “186: Assessing the impact of open educational resources with C. Edward Watson.” *Teaching in HigherEd*. January 4, 2018. Podcast. MP3 audio, 35:59.

<https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/assessing-impact-open-educational-resources/#transcriptcontainer>.

Programmatic SWOT Analysis Activity

- The facilitator will introduce participants to the SWOT Analysis Technique of identifying perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that could come of full OER implementation across a large core course program.
 - The facilitator will invite participants to create their own, program-specific SWOT analyses.
-

Group Discussion of SWOT Analyses

- If breakout rooms are available, the facilitator will create those to foster smaller, more intimate conversations among participants.
 - Participants will provide feedback to other participants using the [Troika Consulting Method](#) established by the Liberating Structures Organization.
 - If breakout rooms are not available, the facilitator will adapt by using waterfall questioning to establish a backchannel conversation in the chat that she will then moderate and use to invite individual participants to speak to the larger group about their analyses.
-

Next Steps for Implementation

- As a second-to-last step in this workshop, the facilitator will ask participants to set goals for implementation using the [SMART Goal-Setting Method](#).
 - The facilitator will give a brief overview of the method.
 - The facilitator will prompt the participants to write their own, unique-to-them SMART Goals to determine their next actionable steps.
 - The facilitator will invite participants to share their goals with the larger group for collective inspiration and insight.
-

Q&A Time

- With the time that remains, the facilitator will yield the floor to questions and

further discussion from the audience.