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Opening up to OER
Creating Open Education Awareness on a large campus

Like many academic libraries, the University of Texas Libraries (UT) at UT-Austin is looking for ways to increase awareness of open educational resources (OER) on our campus. Our university does not have an OER mandate from our central campus administration, so the path towards greater awareness hasn't been straightforward. We hope that sharing our nascent attempts to start this conversation on our campus, which have included starting a working group, offering faculty workshops, and fundraising for an OER librarian position, will help others begin to champion OER on their campuses.

SPARC (defines OER as teaching, learning, and research resources released under an open license that permits their free use and repurposing by others.[1] OER can be textbooks, full courses, lesson plans, videos, tests, software, or any other tool, material, or technique that supports access to knowledge.

OER at UT

UT-Austin is a research-intensive university, and many of the strategic initiatives on campus are focused on research endeavors. UT has 3,722 total faculty, with 1,858 tenured or tenure-track, and 1,854 nontenure-track. We have 51,050 students, 10,933 of whom are graduate students.[2] Within the library, we have a scholarly communication librarian with open education as one of her areas of responsibility. Our liaison librarians do not have open education as part of their job descriptions, but many open education activities are related to their jobs, including scholarly communication and instructional support. The Libraries' vice provost and director has a special interest in the open agenda and has provided enthusiastic support and encouragement for our efforts and works hard to educate and inform administrators at UT. UT is also home to a national foreign language resource center, the Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL),[3] which creates and maintains OER about language learning.

There are pockets of interest in OER on our campus, mostly within the College of Liberal Arts and especially within foreign language instruction, but there isn't a campus-wide initiative to increase OER adoption. Tenure-track faculty are not necessarily opposed to OER and more affordable options for students, but since they have so many different priorities (securing grant funding, research and publishing, teaching, service) it can be difficult for them to find the time needed to totally convert courses to OER. Tenure and promotion still heavily prioritize traditional publishing and grant funding.

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There is interest at UT in providing afford-able course content, and one method that is gaining interest on our campus is inclusive access. Inclusive access is a business model that allows every student to have the same materials on the first day of class, with the charge for materials included as part of their tuition.[4] UT is planning to roll out inclusive access in fall 2020, and faculty will be able to opt-in to the program. There are several faculty who are interested in bringing the inclusive access model into large enrollment courses in an effort to lower costs for students. Inclusive access has many benefits for fac-ulty members, including congruity with their textbooks, helpful extras like test questions, and homework assignments with automatic grading. We can recognize the importance of these extras while still advocating for inclusive access as an incremental move towards OER. Right now, we want to think of campus-wide increased adoption of OER as a big tent, and include anyone interested in lowering text-book costs in the conversation.

Promoting OER

Though there are some barriers to OER adoption on our campus, we in the librar-ies are attempting to foster conversations and excitement around OER. We created an OER outreach working group with mem-bers from UTL, COERLL, Texas Digital Li-brary (TDL), and UT faculty. Our partners are an integral part of this group. COERLL works nationally but is located at UT, and as a result of COERLL's work, many of the fac-ulty on our campus who are aware of and have embraced open initiatives are from our languages departments. As we expand campus conversations about OER, we are relying heavily on our partners at COERLL to share experiences and strategies they've used successfully. TDL is a consortium of academic libraries that builds capacity for digital scholarship and supports open ac-cess initiatives in higher education.[5] TDL also co-hosted a statewide OER summit for Texas institutions as part of an ongoing in-terest in spreading information about OER.[6]

We've used Open Education Week[7] and Open Access Week as opportunities to get faculty and students on campus talking about topics related to greater access to informa-tion. We've been able to include faculty voices in those discussions through guest blog posts on our library blog Tex Libris,[8] discussion panels, and drop-in table events. These events have resulted in more in-depth conversations with faculty and students, but haven't created wider momentum around open agenda issues.

Our working group has hosted five work-shops for the campus community. We've had a total of 120 participants at our workshops, and have intentionally tried to keep each workshop small to allow for hands-on work and personal attention. Participants have included faculty and instructors, graduate students (both TAs and non-TAs), library staff, and other staff. Our goal for our ongo-ing workshop series is to build a community around OER by scaffolding OER skills into our workshops. Two of our workshops so far were introductory; two built in skills around finding, evaluating, and remixing OERs (one of these included a discussion about positioning OER as part of a tenure packet); and one concentrated on open pedagogy. We think this strategy has been successful, as we've had some repeat participants across workshops. When looking at survey feedback across all of our workshops, 75% of respon-dents rated their level of OER knowledge as either a 4 or 5 out of 5 (with 5 being the highest). When asked how comfortable they would feel explaining OER to someone else, 77% rated their comfort level as a 4 or 5 out of 5.

Each workshop has featured faculty mem-bers who use OER in their classes, some in small ways, and some as the backbone of their classes. Faculty participation has been integral to the success of these workshops. Faculty panels and presentations are a draw for other faculty members and have allowed us to present the spectrum of options avail-able as our instructors consider adopting truly open or low-cost materials. Our faculty

members have shared everything from fully open and self-created materials like the OER textbook Reality Czech[9] to low-cost materials like inclusive access textbooks. We welcome discussion of any strategies for reducing cost-burdens on students and moving in an open direction for courses. For anyone considering a series like ours, we recommend being flexible when discussing strategies. In our experience low-cost options, even if not fully open, can be a gateway for adoption of open materials.

During our first OER workshop, we created a document with all participants called Talkin 'Bout OER.[10] This document is a collection of pro-OER talking points aimed at different constituencies. We created it with the participants at our first workshop because this was a resource we wanted when we began our OER working group. We've continued to create resources as part of our workshops. Our second workshop included a section in which participants could choose stations based on what they were interested in discussing. We collected the notes from each of these rich discussions and used them to formulate future workshop topics, in addition to sharing them with workshop participants. We've been able to use outputs from our workshops to help us plan future offerings (our pedagogy-focused workshop idea was born from these station notes), to promote our community on campus, and to help staff and faculty on our campus talk about OERs. We recommend using workshop time to create resources for your campus, too.

Our students, as we hear from our UT Libraries Student Library Council and as demonstrated in the UT System Student Advisory Council recommendations beginning in 2005, care deeply about textbook affordability.[11] We are working to channel this concern among our student leaders, both at the undergraduate and graduate level, into action. Frequent turnover in student leadership makes long-term efforts difficult, but we have recently had a breakthrough. Two members of our working group serve on the Student Library Council, and have discussed OER in meetings with student government representatives. In spring 2019, students from the Senate of College Councils, a campus governing body that covers academic issues, reached out to us with draft legislation about OER for their spring session. Our working group collaborated with them to clarify details in the legislation and include resolutions asking for funding for faculty incentives. This legislation passed and was sent to the university president, provost, and other top-level administrators. In fall 2019, students from the College of Natural Sciences inquired about creating an award for faculty who use or create OER. We believe this work is still in progress. Having student government involved is a significant step in our efforts to raise awareness of OER on our campus.

Opportunities

With the success of our workshop series, work with student government, and other initiatives, we are well positioned for future efforts around awareness and adoption of OER. Fortunately, we will soon have more resources to devote to this effort. We received a grant from the Tocker Foundation to fund a five-year open education librarian position. We hope to have someone on board by summer 2020 to lead our OER efforts and build on the foundation the outreach group has built. One project we hope they will take on is targeted workshops in department spaces outside of the library, which will be branded as "OER Roadshows." We also secured a grant from the Lebermann Foundation to create a library innovation fund. The first priority for that fund will be OER incentive grants for faculty.

Our campus bookstore is independent and community-owned. Librarians have met with the textbook manager of the bookstore in order to get a better picture of what is required for courses, and the bookstore manager was open to partnering with the libraries. He shares similar concerns for student affordability and also faces similar

challenges when trying to gather information from faculty about their courses. We hope to build on this positive partnership.

Additionally, we continue to have strong support from library administration. Our vice provost and director provided us with a small amount of funding for lunches and refreshments at our workshops, and she gave the introductory remarks at one of our workshops. We expect this continued support from our administration, the recent passage of student legislation, and our new open education librarian position to push the conversation about OER to the next level on the UT-Austin campus.

Acknowledgements

Notes

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8. University of Texas Libraries, "Open Education Week Posts," TexLibris (blog), March 2018, https://texlibris.lib.utexas.edu/tag/open-education-week/.

9. Reality Czech, accessed March 27, 2020, https://realityczech.org/.

10. Gina Bastone, et al., "Talkin' 'Bout OER," Texas ScholarWorks (institutional repository), October 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/2152/69099.

11. The University of Texas System, "Previous Recommendations," 2005-2015, https://utsystem.edu/offices/academic-affairs/previous-recommendations. 𝕫

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7. ACRL, "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" (Chicago: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015): 13, www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/infolit/framework1.pdf.

8. Ibid., 16.

9. Ibid., 23.

10. Ibid., 12.

11. Ibid., 20.

12. Folk, "Drawing on Students' Funds of Knowledge," 55. 𝕫