

EXPLORATORY ESSAY

Exploring Easy-to-Use OER Curation Spaces

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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This exploratory piece is intended to set the stage for an ongoing conversation about Open Educational Resources (OER). The current OER landscape has hundreds of repositories and thousands of curated guides and lists for finding OER—few of which “talk” to each other behind the scenes, resulting in separate and often redundant resources and the duplication of labor. The tool proposed in this exploratory piece is an iterative solution to this problem and focuses on how OER advocates, like librarians and instructional designers, can work together to create an environment that is welcoming and easy to use for educators. The tool aims to reduce redundancies in the OER space while simultaneously offering support to those who are in time-poor roles.

Background

OER are materials that support learning—including but not limited to textbooks, videos, digital learning objects, and practice problems. These resources support teaching and learning in classrooms from K–12 through

higher education across the nation and the globe. The creation and use of these resources have been on the rise throughout the world as access to information via the internet has brought knowledge, content, and experiences to the forefront of communication and education. There are national programs like the [United States Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Program](#) that support institutions as they create and expand the use of open textbooks. Beyond grants, there are non-profits, such as OpenStax, “the world’s largest publisher of free OER. Trusted by 70% of U.S. colleges and universities, OpenStax has saved students \$2.9 billion in education costs since 2012, and individual creators like industry professionals or faculty members” (OpenStax, n.d., Landing page description). Once an OER is created, it is involved in the ecosystem of the 5Rs: Retain, Reuse, Remix, Revise, and Redistribute. This ecosystem allows for the content to be used, updated, redistributed, and made available around the nation and world.

National System Examples of OER Discovery

In this open education ecosystem of resources, there are recognizable pillars that many users, experts, and librarians refer to as they search for materials. For example, [MERLOT](#) functions like a search engine powered by user and expert submissions. [OER Commons](#) has a similar format with the addition of an author tool that allows creators to create OER native to the OER Commons platform. These discovery platforms have numerous items and often have areas for comments and rating scales to share information between users. These items can refer to a variety of resources, and one example is an entry for a textbook created by OpenStax. However, a user can also go directly to the OpenStax website to look at the textbooks by browsing collections of OpenStax materials.

In a nutshell, these platforms function similarly to walking into a library. Sometimes, there are multiples of one item. Sometimes, what is being looked for does not exist, and sometimes, the perfect resource is available. However, there is a lot of hidden labor. It is up to users to learn how to navigate these spaces, critically evaluate the resources, and align them to any teaching requirements needed to be followed.

State System Example of OER Discovery

An example of this hidden labor in effect is in Colorado. While the [Colorado Department of Higher Education](#) does offer grants, supports an annual conference and OERColorado, the site focuses on PK–12 resources (OERColorado, n.d.). This leaves those in

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higher education to use their own resources to learn how to navigate open spaces, critically evaluate resources, then find and align resources to any teaching requirements they may have to follow.

Meanwhile, some states have dedicated time, energy, and effort in Open Education and developed resources for residents of their state and beyond. For example, Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG, n.d.) allows users to search for affordable and open resources, supports funded grants to increase open resources, and helps communicate the impact of open education via interactive dashboards. If a user is looking for an OER text for a course, for example, [Open ALG](#) has collections of OER textbooks that are “made to cover the scope and sequence of a University System of Georgia course. Ancillary materials for these are included on the textbook’s front page” (Open ALG, n.d., Open textbook description). This greatly reduces the labor required at all points of the process. However, users still have to learn how to navigate space for the textbook they want, since the ancillaries are included on the front page of the textbook. Users still need to critically evaluate the resources they find and align them to teaching requirements, but they have reassurance that the resources have been created precisely for their college system with their specific systems needs in mind. While this is created for Higher Education, there are a variety of opportunities beyond higher education.

While it is an exciting opportunity, finding, implementing, and creating OER can be overwhelming. As mentioned at the offset of our conversation, and to date, many systems, universities, and libraries have created a vast number of initiatives and curated guides. Some of these are hubs or repositories from the [Momentum on Open Educational Resources \(MOER\)](#) at the University of Texas System, [OpenFL](#) from the Florida Virtual Campus, and [OERColorado](#) from the Colorado River Board of Cooperative Educational Services. Some host open courses or lectures like [OpenCourseWare](#) by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The [University of Incarnate Word](#) and [Florida Department of State](#) offer guides on the use of OERs and the location of several other repositories. On top of these numerous and slightly different policies and resources, there are unique repositories and reformatories for OER—including [OERTX](#), which is specific to the state of Texas, and others, like [MERLOT](#), a global interface. There are what feels like infinitely more resources, repositories, and curated guides that attempt to support users and creators of OER, but for

someone new to the space, it can be overwhelming. I would know—this was me 2 years ago.

An Argument for Course Rubric and Skill-Based OER Curation

Having experienced this vastness of information, I developed iterative solutions, from creating shareable bookmark groups (there were hundreds of bookmarks) to Microsoft PowerApp (problematic for the openness of it all), and finally, an [Open Resource site](#). This site is intended to be a place to find all the places to look for OER, and eventually, it will also have short video clips of how to use the resources within the interface. While this addressed the “Where do I start?” concern, it did little for overworked faculty who needed more immediate support and solutions to support student success. For more information on how [Open Education supports Student Success](#), this poster might be of interest. To bridge the resource site to make it more applicable for a broader audience and increase the applicability of the resources, I developed a site based on the common course numbering system for Texas. Common course numbering systems are a solution to articulate and transfer credit between institutions in the same state. They provide paths forward for students and faculty to understand what courses count in what ways for a given program and, in this instance, offer a way to curate resources to reduce the time it takes to find OER for a given course. While I built an interface for Texas, this process can be duplicated for states with common course numbering systems or similar articulation agreements (Education Commission of the States, 2022).

The [Texas Core to Open](#) site takes core courses offered at my current institution, Texas State University, maps those courses to their Texas Common Course Numbering System (TCCNS) identification number, and provides a variety of OER mapped to the TCCNS identification number and the courses at Texas State University. With 80 courses included in this first iteration, any faculty for a core course can locate OER aligned to their class and begin making personal selections for their students. For general information on how to use this interface, see Appendix A; to locate resources for a single course, see Appendix B. Even more exciting—since TCCNS are included—is that other institutions in Texas can use Texas Core to Open to find OER for their courses. An instructor can take the course they are assigned, check which TCCNS identification number matches the course offered at

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their Texas institution, and look at OER related to that number, greatly reducing the time to find OER for their courses. An instructor can also look at TCCNS rubrics for skills they want to emphasize in their course and find relevant OER related to the TCCNS rubric. Although Texas Core to Open was created with Texas in mind, the resources are not Texas specific. These resources can be used for equivalent courses or as educators see fit in their classrooms.

The Author's Advised Actions to Readers

Like many spaces, the transformation towards broader utility for more users takes time and intention. Here are some ways educators can contribute to the transformation of the Open Education space and other spaces in education.

1. Say hello to local OER advocates. They might be a librarian, instructional designer, faculty member, or an administrator.
2. Educate oneself. Learning about Open Education can be part of continuing professional development. Some institutions, state governing bodies, and non-profits offer grants to learn about Open Education. There are some educational resources in Appendix C, Recommended Readings.
3. Practice using the OpenStax, OERColorado, OERTX, the Open Resource site, or the Texas Core to Open site (see Appendix D links to OER sites, which will be growing soon.).
4. Reach out to the author of an OER and offer to work together to collaborate in the future. The more educators and practitioners work together, the faster they can make education open.
5. Be patient during the learning process. Learning, creating, and applying new knowledge, skills, and tools takes time.

Beyond these action items, it may be useful to keep abreast of ongoing adjacent work across many states. For example, the Texas Education Agency has announced [OER for the K–12 space](#), a move that will offer the opportunity to create more custom content depending on the school, family, and individual student. Integrating OER throughout a learner's formative years will reinforce the opportunities for lifelong education and the use of OER in education spaces, thereby creating an expectation of OER use in higher education and cementing the use of OER for workplace training and development. For more information on how to integrate OER early and often in public spaces—visit the poster [Open Education has a Marketing Problem](#). While the Texas Core to Open site is specific to Texas, the open educational resources curated in the site are not.

Another example is the legislation passed in Minnesota. It defines OER, and what a Z-Degree, or zero cost beyond tuition degree, looks like at a state

level. This legislation creates a requirement for all institutions in Minnesota to implement OER resulting in Z-Degrees; this creates an avenue for state funding for this work—something that is not seen in most state policy or legislation at this time (SPARC, 2025). It also professionalizes the labor involved in the creation of these materials, and the State Post Secondary Governing Body provides education, professional development, and learning opportunities around OER (Mission Fulfillment Committee, 2023). This establishes a funded avenue for OER education and creation that can be made available to the community at large (Minn. Stat. § 136F.305, 2019). The Open Textbook Library, based in the Center for Open Education within the University of Minnesota, houses OERs from around the world, but offers some Minnesota specific OERs (Open Textbook Library, n.d.).

The OER material available can be used by anyone, anywhere, when needed, for as long as the links are stable. Yet, there are areas where OER options are slim. Here is where educators and practitioners might make an impact on the future of education; to create the material used in the classrooms and generations to come, with peers across the country, or across the world.

Educators can increase the impact of their discipline's research by creating OER around focused on their research findings allowing instructors to incorporate cutting-edge research into their classrooms. Research can be done in these spaces on the use and impact of OER at an institutional level as well as the impact of having OER about current research incorporated into postsecondary institutions and classrooms. The future of education is open—how are you preparing?

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Appendix A

Navigating the Texas Core to Open Interface

This appendix is intended to help facilitate the navigation of the Texas Core to Open site for new users and first-time users. This step-by-step guide offers more information about each of the areas on the site.

1. Navigate to the Texas Core to Open Site (<https://openresources.notion.site/Texas-Core-to-Open-f4e9c526ae1b4f3d8111862a8465c0ff>).
2. On the landing page users will see:
 - a. Introductory text about the site.
 - b. A list of the components of the site with some short descriptive text.
 - c. Five drop down titles with additional information about the site itself:
 - i. Getting Started—short introductory text about navigating the site.
 - ii. Using Notion—short description of the platform, with guides, tutorials, and templates for using Notion.
 - iii. Future Developments—a space outlining future developments of this site
 - iv. Origin Story—an area dedicated to outlining the inception of this project and its relationship to previous projects.
 - v. Version History & Attribution—a space where the attribution and version history are housed. This includes the creators, compilers, editors, version naming, and update log.
3. Returning to the list of components at the top of the home page, users will take each one by one and outline the information contained therein.
4. Texas Core to Open—this is a link to the landing page. When clicked the homepage will reload.
5. Texas State University (TXST) Core to Open—this is a link to the 80 TXST core courses mapped to the TCCNS rubric and Open resources for the associated TCCNS rubric. See Appendix II—Course Example.
6. Curated Open Content—this is a catalog that powers a portion of the site. Currently, each item of open content has an item entry with the following attributes:
 - a. Material Title (text)
 - b. Link (to the resource)
 - c. Material Type (multi-select)
 - d. TCCNS Rubric (references the separate TCCNS Rubric database)
 - e. TXST Course (references the separate Texas State University Core to Open database)
7. TCCNS—at this time, leads to a landing page with two subpages.
 - a. TCCNS Rubric—this is a database of TCCNS

Rubrics and Transcript Code groups. As outlined above, the items in this database are used to populate the TCCNS Rubric (section 6d). There is additional information about the associated Transcript Code Group, and more information regarding that is in the next section (7b).

- b. State of Texas Core Curriculum Course Component Areas—this area has a description of the component areas and required core objectives affiliated with Texas Core Curriculum courses. The database found on this page has information for each of the transcript code groupings and these items have the following attributes:
 - i. Transcript Code (numerical)
 - ii. Component Area (text)
 - iii. Required Semester Credit Hours for the component area (numerical)
 - iv. Required Core Objectives (abbreviated multi-select)
 - v. Optional Core Objectives
 - vi. TCCNS rubric (references the database in 7a)

Beyond these navigational components and descriptions, there are ways to navigate the interface to find resources for a specific course. An example of this can be found in Appendix B—Course Example.

Appendix B

Course Example

This appendix is intended to give a user a walk-through of how to navigate the Texas Core to Open site to find resources for a specified course. This will allow a user to navigate the site, understand how it works, and identify potential resources to use in courses. As the site states, this resource is intended to ease the burden of finding materials to consider for a common core course, but the instructor of record is the subject matter expert and final decision maker when it comes to what material is appropriate for their students.

For this example, we will take a look at College Writing I as it appears at Texas State University.

1. Navigate to the Texas Core to Open site.
2. Select Texas State University Core to Open.
3. Here there are two options:
 - a. Scroll until the “College Writing I” appears in the left-hand column.
 - b. Use the search feature (as indicated by the magnifying glass or spyglass) and search “College Writing I.”
4. Hover over the “College Writing I” text—this should result in an “Open” button appearing.

5. Select the text or “Open” button.
6. Selecting this text or using the “Open” button will open the item entry for “College Writing I” as a partial window.
7. At this time, users can remain in the partial window, or they can navigate to a full screen version via the button indicated arrows extending in opposite directions in the top left corner of the item.
8. Regardless of the navigation pane, the item record for “College Writing I” has information that currently includes:
 - a. Curated open content (references the separate Curated Open Content database)
 - b. TCCNS Rubric (references the separate TCCNS Rubric database)
 - c. TXST Course Number (numerical)
 - d. TXST Rubric (selection)
 - e. Transcript Code Group (references the State of Texas Core Curriculum Course Component Areas database)
9. Scrolling past the item record information, there is a space for text and an embedded and filtered view of the Curated Open Content database based on the TCCNS rubric associated with “College Writing I.”
10. Browse the listed content as an overview or click on the items themselves for more information and a link to the resource.

Appendix C

Recommended Readings

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Appendix D

OER Repositories

Title of Page	Link	Quote & Location Description
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Open-CourseWare	https://ocw.mit.edu/	"MIT OpenCourseWare is an online publication of materials from over 2,500 MIT courses, freely sharing knowledge with learners and educators around the world." (n.d., Footer)
MERLOT	https://merlot.org/merlot/	"The MERLOT system provides access to curated online learning and support materials and content creation tools, led by an international community of educators, learners and researchers." (n.d., Descriptive heading text)
OER Commons	https://oercommons.org/	"OER Commons offers a comprehensive infrastructure for curriculum experts and instructors at all levels to identify high-quality OER and collaborate around their adaptation, evaluation, and use to address the needs of teachers and learners." (n.d., ISKME and OER Commons)
OERColorado	https://oercolorado.org/	"Colorado's microsite for Open Educational Resources, where PK-12 educators are empowered to use openly licensed digital resources." (n.d., Welcome to OERColorado!)
OERTX	https://oertx.highered.texas.gov/about	"Connecting students, educators, and institutions to open educational resources" (n.d., Descriptive text overlaid in heading image below title 'About OERTX')
Open ALG	https://alg.manifoldapp.org/	"ALG's programs allow day-one access to critical classroom materials for students across the University System of Georgia." (n.d., Transforming access)
Open Resource Catalog	https://openresources.notion.site/Open-Resources-7939cb-6846c441aaa89bd6b4a9545066	"The Open Resource site is intended to facilitate discovery and use of open resources starting with Open Educational Resources (OER)." (n.d., Main description of site on landing page)
Open Textbook Library	https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks	"Open textbooks are licensed by authors and publishers to be freely used and adapted. Download, edit and distribute them at no cost. Now offering 1579 open textbooks, the Open Textbook Library is supported by the Open Education Network." (n.d., Transform higher education and student learning)
OpenFL	https://openfl.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/oer%3Aroot	"A statewide, internet-based, searchable database of Open Education Resources (OER) curated by the students, librarians, faculty, and staff from the Florida College System (FCS) and State University System (SUS) institutions." (n.d., Site introduction)
OpenStax	https://openstax.org/	"OpenStax is the world's largest publisher of open education resources (OER) and a provider of interactive learning technologies and education research for high school and college. We are a non-profit initiative of Rice University." (n.d., Landing page description)
Texas Core to Open	https://openresources.notion.site/Texas-Core-to-Open-f4e9c526ae1b4f-3d8111862a8465c0ff	"The Texas Core to Open site is intended to facilitate discovery and use of open resources for core courses across the state of Texas at institutions of higher education." (n.d., Main description of site on landing page)

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