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Alejandra Nann
University of San Diego, ajsnann@sandiego.edu

Julia I. Hess
Ball State University, jihess@bsu.edu

Sarah Norris
University of Central Florida, sarah.norris@ucf.edu

John Raible
University of Central Florida, john.raible@ucf.edu

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A Tale of Two Campuses: Open Educational Resources in Florida and California Academic Institutions

Alejandra Nann, Electronic Resources and Serials Librarian, Copley Library, University of San Diego

Julia Hess, Head of Metadata and Copy Cataloging, Ball State Libraries, Ball State University

Sarah Norris, Scholarly Communication Librarian, John C. Hitt Library, University of Central Florida

John Raible, Instructional Designer, Center for Distributed Learning, University of Central Florida

Abstract

Open educational resources (OER) provide a high-quality and low-cost alternative to traditional textbooks. The University of Central Florida (UCF) and the University of San Diego (USD) have been engaged in a multitude of efforts related to OER and textbook affordability. This article will discuss the textbook affordability climate at the state (Florida and California) and institutional (UCF and USD) level. Macro and microventures and lessons learned will be shared by both institutions ranging from perceptions of open education resources by the universities to collaborating with constituents across campus, in addition to specific case studies with UCF faculty teaching online and face-to-face courses as well as USD's stipend program. Lastly, the article will discuss future developments and continuous improvements by educating UCF and USD campus communities through several initiatives and new partnerships with stakeholders.

OER at the State Level

Florida

The State of Florida began its textbook affordability efforts in 2008 with the passage of Florida Statute 1004.085. The direct student benefit of this law requires each public higher education institution to post a public list of required textbooks at least 30 days before each semester begins (Textbook Affordability Act, 2008). The spirit of the law is to allow the purchasing required materials through other, possibly cheaper, retailers.

Raible and deNoyelles (2015, p.6) conducted an analysis of bookstore contracts in the State University System of Florida. They found two universities whose bookstore contract directly addressed textbook affordability beyond providing rental programs. One university adopted specific textbook affordability language allowing the university to pursue alternative content delivery methods without the bookstore's permission or involvement. The university cited Florida Statute 1004.085 as the rationale for this contract language.

The national conversation about textbook affordability continued after the passage of the 2008 textbook affordability law. In the 2015–2016 Florida legislative session, various updates were passed. Major changes included the extension to 45 days from 30 days for institutions to publish required course materials. The term instructional materials was introduced to broaden the scope of the law. Open educational resources (OER) are encouraged to be adopted in general education courses. Perhaps the biggest change is requiring each institution to document annually report textbook and instructional material affordability efforts (Textbook Affordability Act, 2016).

California

California tackled the textbook affordability issue by focusing specifically on open education resource (OER) initiatives. In 2008, the state enacted its first OER law, authorizing the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges (CCC) "to establish a pilot program to provide faculty and staff from community college districts around the state with the information, methods, and instructional materials to establish open education resources centers" (Wiley, 2008).

In 2012, the state legislature directed that the state's public higher education systems develop an OER

digital library, and in 2013, they created and funded the California OER Council. The California OER Council, run by members of the California Community Colleges (CCC), California State University (CSU), and the University of California (UC), was charged with implementing a variety of state OER programs (California Open Educational Resources Council, 2011). CSU, already experienced in managing such efforts, was directed to lead the establishment of the California Digital Open Source Library, seek private funds, and administer the matching funds by the state (About, 2015).

California continues to implement new initiatives at the state level. The 2016–2017 California state budget, for example, includes a one-time $5 million fund to provide a competitive grant for community colleges. Grants will provide institutions with up to $200,000 for each zero-textbook-cost associate's degree or certificate, allowing students to enroll in a program guaranteed that they will not have to buy expensive textbooks (Lesko, 2016).

OER at the Institutional Level

Florida

At the University of Central Florida, no institutional initiatives exist to promote textbook affordability. A working textbook affordability group was established by the John C. Hitt Library and the Center for Distributed Learning. The goals of this working group is to create a campus environment favorable to textbook affordability and systematically promote high-quality, ADA-compliant, open educational resources, and library-sourced content to reduce student costs.

The working group's goals are limited to OER and library-source materials due to restrictions of the institution's bookstore contract. The current contract's language includes an exclusivity clause stating the bookstore is the "exclusive seller of required, recommended, suggested, course packs, no exceptions" (University of Central Florida, 2003). The bookstore contract expires September 30, 2017, and the working group has provided value input to the institution for including textbook affordability language and practices for the next contract term.

Case Studies. OER efforts on UCF's campus can best be illustrated be several case studies, which highlight

the various types of activities related to open educational resources in the classroom. These activities are categorized in three distinct ways. These include:

- Determining if present materials used in the classroom are openly accessible through other avenues;
- Offering open and/or library-sourced materials as an optional replacement for an existing textbook; and
- Adopting an open and/or library-sourced book as a required textbook.

The first case study explores determining if present materials used in the classroom are openly accessible through other avenues. In this particular instance, a lecturer teaching an English literature course utilized public domain and/or creative commons licensed materials. The lecturer's required texts focused on works from the medieval period through the late 18th century, much of which existed in the public domain. The lecturer initially became interested in the project after a UCF Libraries subject librarian reached out to discuss open alternatives to their required text. Assessing the required reading, conducting an analysis, and ultimately creating an OER anthology for the course was a collaborative effort that included the library's Office of Scholarly Communication, subject librarian, and instructional designers. Each played an important role in vetting the content for appropriateness and copyright compliance. With an ePub version of required readings available free of charge, the only potential out-of-pocket expense to the student was a text purchase for one work still protected by copyright and available at a nominal fee. Despite having to purchase a text, the course has still seen significant savings to the student.

The second case study explores offering open and/or library-sourced materials as an optional replacement for an existing textbook. In this case, a microeconomics professor had been utilizing an OpenStax open textbook as an alternative text for their course. The faculty member utilized this as a free alternative for his students and did not seek library and/or CDL intervention for implementation; in fact, an instructional designer discovered that the faculty member was using the OpenStax book while researching high-quality open textbooks. The working group members conducted a survey of the faculty member's students in the spring of 2016 and

the summer of 2017 to survey which book(s) they used and their perceptions of OER content, all of which were received positively.

The final case study explores adopting an open and/or library-sourced book as a required textbook. In this particular case, an American history lecturer attended a campus presentation on OER given by the working group. This prompted interest in OpenStax as an alternative to the currently offered textbook for their course. Working closely with the instructional designers, the faculty member ultimately decided to utilize the OpenStax book as the primary required textbook for their course. Like the previous case studies, a survey was distributed to students, with positive feedback from students.

Overall, each of these courses saw significant student savings, ranging from $1,800 a semester to over $200,000 per semester—with additional significant savings over time should these OER materials continue to be used by the faculty members and students. Additionally, both students and faculty have indicated positive feedback on surveys administered to each course.

California

During the 2014–2015 academic year, some librarians formed a small working group with the goal of gauging interest in OER on campus through surveys, focus groups, and workshops. These efforts were less successful than hoped, so the working group explored an alternative: Financial incentives. Following an application process, four faculty were selected to receive $1,000 stipends in exchange for attempting to replace a textbook in one course with OER during the 2015–2016 academic year and write a two- to three-page report by the end of the following summer. Members of the group met individually with the participants over the summer to introduce them to the project, and they were aware that they could contact the librarians at any time with questions, but otherwise the librarians did not regularly communicate with the faculty throughout the academic year. An analysis at the end of the year showed that the pilot program had saved 118 students approximately $12,000 in textbook costs.

At the end of the first year, the working group took time during the spring of 2016 to evaluate lessons from faculty feedback and their own observation.

There were three key notes made during the evaluation process. First, the librarians had assumed that if professors had any questions, they would reach out, but this turned out not to be the case; in some cases, they just gave up. Second, because the university's fiscal year runs July to June, reports need to be turned in by early June. That allows faculty to receive their stipends in the correct fiscal year. Lastly, the librarians should begin contacting other stakeholders on campus (e.g., the bookstore and student groups) to come up with potential avenues for collaboration, offer a smoother transition to faculty implementing OER, and increase promotional efforts.

Promotion and marketing were not key strengths during the first year pilot. E-mail blasts to faculty work on occasion, but the librarians wanted to get more creative with promotional activities. One librarian from the OER working group created an OER poster for Copley Library's Salon in 2016. The Salon is a poster session where faculty are invited to learn about resources and services the library offers. She spoke to a number of faculty about OER and Copley Library's OER initiative. Another event the librarians participated in was the New Faculty Reception that is hosted annually by Copley Library. The librarians requested a time slot to introduce new faculty to the Copley Library OER initiative and ways faculty can get involved.

Since more funding was provided for the 2016–2017 academic school year, the librarians sent out a call for proposals for faculty to participate in the OER initiative. The librarians created a rubric to evaluate applications fairly. The rubric consisted of three components:

- Cost savings: How much money will the faculty member save the students by replacing the textbook with OER?
- Feasibility: Can their project be reasonably accomplished during the academic year?
- Impact: How will it benefit their students and is it sustainable?

During the course of the initiative's first year, the Dean spoke with several stakeholders including the Provost, Dean's Counsel, and board meetings regarding the OER initiative. Additionally, the librarians met with the Textbook Manager from the university bookstore to discuss a potential

partnership. Through that meeting, they were able to come up with an alternative to students and faculty who prefer to study with print material. If a stipend recipient implements OER that fall under the public domain or creative commons license that allows for distribution, the bookstore will work with the university print shop to print and bind the course material, similar to a course pack, and sell it for a nominal fee.

In the 2016–2017 academic year, the librarians were able to accept nine faculty members to join the Copley OER initiative and replace a textbook with OER. The librarians hosted two group meetings during the summer as an opportunity to introduce the faculty to OER and gave them an idea of what to expect from the program. Additionally, the librarians are offering two nonrequired meetings per semester as an opportunity for the nine faculty to meet and ask questions, discuss successes and challenges, and provide information about their experiences with OER. Lastly, the librarians email the faculty members monthly to check-in and offer one-on-one meetings in case a stipend recipient needs additional help locating the right OER for their class.

Although the current OER initiative stipend program is doing well, the librarians continue to explore other options to raise awareness and educate faculty on OER. After receiving more funding, the librarians launched Copley Library Open Textbook Review. The program offers a $250 stipend to faculty who find a suitable textbook in their field and write a short review. A call for proposals was sent out at the beginning of the academic year, and the librarians were able to accept 23 faculty applicants into the program. Finally, Copley Library is creating a committee beginning in the spring of 2017. The charge of the committee will be to discuss current news and events related to OER, educate the campus community on OER, and continue creating innovative ways to improve the OER initiative.

Conclusion

As institutions of various sizes continue to explore the impact of OER and textbook affordability on their campus, it is important for constituents to identify and focus on ways to educate members of the community on the importance of OER and how it can largely benefit students. Integrating the use of OER can range from presenting workshops to members of the university community to creating initiatives that offer stipends to faculty who implement OER or create OER for their class.

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