LIBRARIANS OPENING UP OPEN EDUCATION

A UNIVERSITY, COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND PUBLIC LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP TO INCREASE OER USAGE IN TEXAS

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BACKGROUND

UT Libraries (UTL) is uniquely positioned at the University of Texas at Austin to promote and assist with the adoption and usage of open educational resources (OER) by university students and faculty. However, UTL is not well situated to connect these resources to the broader public beyond the university campus. From a 2019 statewide survey, we know that 38 percent of responding academic libraries have an open education program.[1] As academic librarians, we wanted to find a way to partner with Austin Public Library (APL) and create an open education program with the potential to dramatically expand our reach, bridge the gap between academic and public libraries, and potentially save students thousands of dollars over their academic careers.

Building on our shared goal of increased information access, UTL partnered with APL in 2019 to promote the use of OER in the greater Austin community. Through this partnership, we have learned that the primary groups in greater Austin likely to use OER include teachers from Austin Independent School District (ISD) and Del Valle ISD, Austin Homeschool Network, and individuals who come to APL for workforce and economic development trainings. We have also identified gaps in our collective experience, primarily in terms of assisting with workforce and economic development, that have led to the extension of our partnership to include Austin Community College (ACC)—a leader in OER programs—in this important work. Going forward, we are excited to harness the talent and expertise that each library brings to the table to best serve our community.

GOALS

Goals for this pilot program have been driven primarily by the needs and desires of APL. These goals include increased awareness of OER among high school students and their families, as well as school librarians, guidance counselors, and teachers. APL's reference staff will

be trained by UTL and ACC librarians to provide a working knowledge of open educational principles and resources for use in reference interactions, educator in-service training, and college readiness programming.

Early exposure to OER can broaden the understanding of how to take advantage of financial savings that increase access to higher education, especially for first-generation college students.[2] Working with APL college readiness staff, we want to expand this level of knowledge to first-generation applicants and their families, allowing these students to enter college already aware of affordable learning materials. That knowledge can help them advocate for greater use of OER by their instructors and at the very least can provide them with supplemental materials that they can use to enhance their learning.

For instructors, we aim to highlight the open licenses that make OER customizable for specific courses. School librarians and teachers are already using freely available resources in their instruction. A recent study by ISKME surveyed school librarians in several states and found that school librarians are also adapting, evaluating, and re-sharing those materials.[3] We hope our training helps Austin ISD and Del Valle ISD librarians and faculty be more intentional about their use of OER to supplement required curriculum.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

UTL received a grant in fall 2019 from the Tocker Foundation funding an open education librarian position at UTL for five years. The Tocker Foundation is an Austin-based philanthropic organization primarily focused on supporting and improving resources and services in rural Texas libraries.[4] The Tocker open education librarian will start in August 2020 and will take over the open education program at UTL, including serving as the lead facilitator of this collaboration with ACC and APL. Using the APL partnership as a pilot program, UTL hopes to expand this train-the-trainer model of OER education to public libraries across the wider state in line with the goals of the Tocker Foundation's grant.

One key aspect of the collaboration is training and awareness for public librarians. Together with ACC, UTL will colead workshops to train APL librarians on OER so they can start offering them in their list of resources and services. This training and information sharing has the potential to serve thousands in the Austin community who come to APL for research help. To further these efforts, UTL, APL, and ACC would colead additional targeted workshops for local school district staff.

The first workshop, Open Educational Resources: What's Your Role?, was held February 21, 2020, at APL as part of its systemwide staff development day.[5] Librarians from UTL and ACC provided a workshop and conversation that served as an introduction to OER.[6] The workshop not only defined OER and open licenses, but also provided a brief overview of the diversity of searching platforms and outlined the Texas legislative landscape surrounding OER. A significant piece of the presentation focused on the crucial roles librarians have in OER work, with an emphasis on a librarian's professional commitment to equitable access to information and resources for all users. The objective was to help public librarians identify their role in OER. It is the public librarians' strong relationships with various student and parent communities that positions them to become advocates, educators, curators, and creators of OER. Participants walked away from this initial workshop with a broader understanding of OER and the roles public libraries and librarians have in awareness and use of these resources.

Our intention was to offer more intensive training during the summer to help APL librarians ramp up for the start of the 2020–2021 academic year. The COVID-19 pandemic presents

both a unique opportunity to promote OER and significant complications to outreach efforts. With all Austin area libraries closed, it's unlikely that in-person training will be possible. One idea to keep this collaboration moving forward is to adapt the ACC Learn OER resource for use by public and school librarians, allowing for an online option to learn more about OER.[7]

Our goal over the course of the Tocker Foundation grant is to reach all the reference librarians within APL and by extension the faculty and staff associated with local school districts and homeschool networks, as well as high schoolers and their families who come to APL for college readiness programming and FAFSA preparation.

FUTURE PLANS

To extend this cross-training to librarians across Texas and increase OER awareness and engagement among rural public libraries, we will seek out two or three annual conference presentation opportunities, in addition to exploring virtual learning opportunities. Lessons learned from the partnership among UTL, APL, and ACC will guide future public library programming and outreach efforts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the cross-institutional collaboration described above advance the goals of each participating organization?
2. The authors refer to the "Texas legislative landscape surrounding OER"; what is that landscape, and what does it mean for librarians working to advance OER in Texas?
3. How can collaboration across institutional or organizational boundaries result in better projects and outcomes?

NOTES

1. C. Jimes et al., *Open Educational Resources (OER) in Texas Higher Education* (Austin: Digital Higher Education Consortium of Texas and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Half Moon Bay, CA: Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education, 2019), https://reportcenter.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/reports-and-studies-non-fiscal/oer-texas/.
2. DeeAnn Ivie and Carolyn Ellis, "Advancing Access for First-Generation College Students: OER Advocacy at UT San Antonio," in *OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians*, ed. Andrew Wesolek, Jonathan Lashley, and Anne Langley (Forest Grove, OR: Pacific University Press, 2018), 213–38.
3. Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education, "Exploring OER Curation and the Role of School Librarians," *ISKME* (blog), 2017, https://www.iskme.org/our-work/exploring-oer-curation-and-role-school-librarians.
4. Tocker Foundation, "About the Tocker Foundation," https://tocker.org/about/.
5. Carrie Gits and Hannah Chapman Tripp, "Open Educational Resources: What's Your Role?" (presentation, Austin Public Library Staff Development Day, February 21, 2020), https://doi.org/10.26153/tsw/7110.
6. Gits and Tripp, "Open Educational Resources."
7. Carrie Gits, ACC Learn OER, online course, Austin Community College, https://sites.google.com/austincc.edu/acclearnoer.

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Jimes, C., A. Karaglani, L. Petrides, J. Rios, J. Sebesta, and K. Torre. *Open Educational Resources (OER) in Texas Higher Education. Austin: Digital Higher Education Consortium of Texas and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board; Half Moon Bay, CA: Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education, 2019*. https://reportcenter.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/reports-and-studies-non-fiscal/oer-texas/.

Tocker Foundation. "About the Tocker Foundation." https://tocker.org/about/.