

**OpenISU**

# **It Worked for Tech Lending. Will It Work for OER, Too?**

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## Background

Open Educational Resources (OER) are learning, teaching, and research resources in any format and medium either in the public domain or released under an open license, allowing others to freely access, re-use, re-purpose, adapt and redistribute them. OER enable students to gain knowledge regardless of their financial or geographic limitations, allowing them to take advantage of learning materials that might otherwise be unavailable. Despite the many benefits to using OER, students and educators alike still underutilize them. By collaborating with educational institutions, faculty members, and students, libraries can provide access to OER, inform students and educators of the benefits of OER, and increase the awareness and use of these materials effectively.

## The Problem With OER Visibility

A recent study from the Iowa State University Library by Abbey Elder and Imtiajul Alam found that a lack of awareness among students and educators is the main reason OER are not being used as widely as it could be. The majority of faculty and students do not know about OER or that they are free to use. Further, even if they are aware of OER, individuals may be unable to locate or use them effectively.

Searching for and evaluating OER takes time and effort. While there are many repositories for sharing OER, there is no central hub where all open content is collected together. The result? Both faculty and students often don't know exactly where to go to locate free and open resources. Educators may not have the time or resources for finding and vetting OER materials, while students may not have the skills or knowledge to evaluate the quality of the resources they find online.

## The importance of Parks Library in increasing OER visibility

It is a natural fit for Parks Library to play a crucial role in increasing the visibility of OER for our users. Libraries have provided education materials for hundreds of years, and have been considered a trusted source of information. In addition, libraries have the expertise and resources to help students and educators use OER effectively, which makes Parks Library an ideal place to promote OER.

## The benefits of increasing OER visibility

Increased visibility of OER can benefit faculty, students, and institutions alike. Benefits include:

- **Cost savings:** By providing free access to educational materials, OER can reduce education costs for students.
- **Access:** OER can make education more accessible to students in areas with limited educational resources or who cannot afford traditional textbooks.

- **Flexibility:** OER offer educators more control over the design of their courses and allow students to learn at their own pace.
- **Collaboration:** OER can facilitate collaboration and sharing among educators and institutions, allowing for the creation and dissemination of high-quality educational resources.
- **Innovation:** By encouraging new teaching and learning methodologies, OER can also accelerate innovation in education.

In addition to these benefits, increasing the visibility of OER can also assist in addressing equity issues in education. Libraries can help to promote equity and social justice in higher education by making OER more visible and accessible for all users.

## **Tech Lending, A Success Story**

Up until 2020, the Tech Lending service at Iowa State University was not widely used. In fact, few knew that it existed. Back then, it was located in the basement of Durham Center, an academic building adjacent to the University Library. Only those desperate for a laptop, tablet, multimedia projector, or other technology equipment would find this spot after scouring different websites and asking around. Once Parks Library took over Tech Lending services and set up a reception desk on the library's first floor in a visible location, this scenario changed dramatically. Students know more about this resource than ever before, and the use of this service has increased from approximately 1,200 equipment lending per year to over 10,000 equipment lending per year: a 733% increase!

The same could be true for OER. Once the University Library's OER services become easily accessible and visible, educators and students will be aware of their existence and be motivated to use them. By increasing the visibility and accessibility of OER support services, educators and students can more easily access the support they need to locate and use OER for their needs. Following the success story of the Tech Lending service, the library could set up a booth to promote OER in a visible location to increase the traffic and overall awareness for the University Library's OER program.



The Tech Lending space is centrally-located near the front door to Parks Library, next to the Collaboration Corridor and printing stations.

## Setting Up an OER Booth

By setting up an OER booth on the main floor of Parks Library, Iowa State University can greatly increase the visibility and accessibility of its Open Education Resources. Here are the steps we can consider:

1. As we have already identified the need for OER through surveys from faculty and students, the logical next step is to develop a plan for setting up the OER booth. This plan should include the booth's location, design, staffing, and promotion. Necessary resources, such as computers, printers, and other equipment, should also be arranged.
2. Then, the location. As discussed, the location of the OER booth is critical to its success. A high-traffic area on the library's main floor should be chosen where students and faculty members will likely see the booth. Electrical outlets and other resources should be considered when designing the booth layout.
3. Once the location is confirmed, the focus should be given to designing the booth: The design of the OER booth should be visually appealing and easy to navigate. There should be appropriate graphics and signage to attract attention and clarify what services are offered.
4. Once the booth is built and set up, friendly and knowledgeable personnel are needed who can answer questions, provide support, and assist users in finding the materials students and faculty need. In addition to Abbey Elder, the lead of Iowa State University's Open Education program, staff should be trained in OER best practices and able to provide guidance on copyright and licensing issues.

5. The next step is promotion. To ensure that the OER booth is widely used, promoting it through various channels is essential. Social media, flyers, posters, and other promotional materials could be used to raise awareness and attract users. Partnerships can be made with interested faculty members to promote the booth to their students and colleagues.
6. Finally, feedback from users of the OER booth should be collected on a regular basis to assess its impact and identify areas for improvement. The feedback would be used to refine the booth's design, staffing, and promotion and ensure that it continues to meet the needs of ISU students and faculty.

By following this action plan, an OER booth could be set up on the library's main floor and increase the visibility and accessibility of OER at ISU.

## **Conclusion**

Open Educational Resources can improve education; however, they will have limited impact until they become widely known and widely used. By collaborating with faculty members, curating collections of OER, and advocating for their use across campus, libraries can contribute to the accessibility and widespread use of OER in their community.