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Open Educational Resources in Kentucky

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OPEN

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN KENTUCKY

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INTRODUCTION

Open educational resources (OER) play an increasingly important role in the education landscape, with increased awareness and use year over year (Coffey). Often, academic libraries play a supporting role for instructors as they locate, adopt, and create OER for their courses. In this article, we will provide an introduction to OER, outline some current trends in open education, and describe a few of the OER initiatives currently underway in Kentucky's college and university libraries.

WHAT ARE OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES?

OER are materials created for teaching and learning that either reside in the public domain or have been released under an open

license that permits the free access, re-use, re-purpose, remix, and redistribution by others (UNESCO). Typically authored by teaching faculty and made available online, OER come in many forms including textbooks, assignments, syllabi, videos, and lecture notes. The use of an open license or public domain assignment is core to OER. Since OER are publicly available and often licensed for remixing, educators have the option to use or adapt pre-existing OER rather than create something completely new.

COST OF COURSE MATERIALS

Reports of what students spend on textbooks vary. The College Board estimates that students at four-year institutions currently spend an average of \$1,260 per year on books and supplies (Ma

and Pender 11). The National Association of College Stores puts that number at under \$300 (National Association of College Stores). The cost for students in Kentucky lies somewhere between these two. A 2023 survey of Kentucky postsecondary students by [Affordable Learning Kentucky](#) (a Kentucky Virtual Library initiative), found that most Kentucky students pay between \$100 and \$300 per semester (survey results not yet posted). This discrepancy may in some part be explained by the increase in automatic textbook billing or “inclusive access” models which obfuscate what individual students spend on course materials (SPARC). The average per credit hour cost for students is \$25 in a campus wide automatic textbook billing model, so a student taking 30 credit hours a year would spend \$750 a year on textbooks, regardless of whether their classes use commercial textbooks or not (“Inclusive Access – Frequently Asked Questions”). In Kentucky, Western Kentucky University’s “Big Red Backpack” program is an example of institution wide automatic billing. Eastern Kentucky University’s “Booksmart” program also employs this strategy but pays for the costs using university operating funds instead of billing students.

Impacts of textbook costs include students dropping from courses or registering for fewer in the first place, earning lower grades, and not purchasing required materials; some research shows that students who are already marginalized in American higher education environments are more impacted (Colvard et al. 262-264; Jenkins et al. 2.4; Nusbaum; VIVA 32-33).

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In addition to removing these textbook costs as a barrier to education, OER provide opportunities for advancing social justice in other ways. Lambert identifies three principles for this: *redistributive justice* (making resources freely available, especially to those for whom lack of access would exclude them from education), *recognitive justice* (diversity in the contents of OER, such as information about and images of marginalized people), and *representational justice* (centering the voices and perspectives of marginalized people as creators of and contributors to OER) (Lambert 227-228). Noting the need for more work on the connection between OER and social justice, Seiferle-Valencia calls for librarians to “advance intentionally engaged OER by selecting inclusive and representative OER,” centering “those people missing from dominant-narrative-aligned resources, and insisting that intentional and specific social justice work is an essential part of open praxis” (Seiferle-Valencia 483). The chapters in the book *Using Open Educational Resources to Promote Social Justice* (conveniently available open access!) demonstrate what that specificity can look like (Ivory & Pashia). Flexibility is essential; the framework of academic open access models cannot be assumed to suit in all contexts. Lar-Son’s 6 R’s of Indigenous OER include relationships, respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance, all centered around reverence (Lar-Son 42:47). Effectively incorporating social justice principles into OER work is a matter of always seeking to learn and adapt, and most of all of embracing nuance.

PEDAGOGY

In addition to the cost and social justice benefits, OER provide numerous pedagogical opportunities for faculty who want to teach with greater flexibility and impact. Perhaps most significantly, OER-enabled pedagogy encourages faculty to eschew disposable

assignments and leverage the possibilities for students to significantly engage in public scholarly discourse. This practice of engaging with students as creators and contributors to the scholarly conversation as opposed to consumers and regurgitators of information is a form of experiential learning in which students demonstrate understanding through the act of creation (Bonica et al. 11-13). The clear line from bell hooks’ liberatory practice theory to open pedagogy practice should be acknowledged here. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she described liberatory pedagogical practices as those which turned away from treating students as consumers of knowledge to treating them as contributors to knowledge (hooks 2-20).

A GROWING FIELD

OER awareness is steadily growing among faculty in the U.S. (Seaman & Seaman 31-32). In keeping with this shift, open education forms an increasingly common element of academic library work. “Not only are librarians influencers in the OER movement, but the OER movement has impacted librarians in their roles as educational collaborators, information literacy instructors, and instructors of future librarians and educators” (Dill & Cullen 338). While positions focused largely or solely on OER are becoming more common in academic libraries, the work itself can vary widely. In an analysis of position descriptions for OER librarian roles, Larson concludes, “Some of the positions weighed heavily toward outreach to raise awareness about OER, some of the positions weighed heavily towards establishing, maintaining, and assessing burgeoning publishing programs, whereas others are still kitchen sink positions with many general library duties thrown in on top of having an overarching OER focus” (Larson 43). A survey of LIS faculty on OER awareness notes that there seems to be an understanding that OER is part of library work, but not direct coverage of it in LIS programs: “LIS faculty align OER with skills that are currently taught in LIS programs, though not specifically about OER” (Katz 428).

A number of organizations, publishers, and events centered around open education are now well established. The Open Textbook Library and OpenStax both observed their tenth anniversaries in 2022 (“Celebrating a Decade of the Open Textbook Library”; Franklin). The Open Education Consortium, which hosts the OE Global Conference, did the same four years before that (“Open Education Consortium Celebrates 10th Anniversary”). The Open Education Conference has met annually since 2004 (“About”). With many smaller regional events (such as OpenCon Ohio) in addition to national and international ones, there are any number of opportunities for engagement with the open education community.

Often led by librarians from college and university libraries or library systems, OER incentive programs are an increasingly common tool used to support teaching faculty through the process of replacing costly course materials with more affordable resources like OER (Lierman 106). Faculty often cite a lack of time, skills, and support in locating and vetting resources as barriers to adopting OER (Griffiths et al. 40) and OER incentive programs are an attempt to alleviate these issues. In addition to a financial sum, incentive programs offer support for locating appropriate OER to adopt, managing OER adaptation or creation projects, and expertise in copyright and licensing.

OER IN KENTUCKY STATEWIDE PATTERNS AND INITIATIVES

The landscape of OER knowledge and adoption in the Commonwealth has followed nationwide trends, including institutions seeking to make grants available for interested faculty, workshops to spread the word, and a survey to learn about students' concerns regarding the costs of their textbooks. Affordable Learning Kentucky, a subset of the Kentucky Virtual Library (KYVL), has worked since 2021 to build Commonwealth-wide momentum to increase the use of OER in the classroom. The Affordable Learning Kentucky Steering Committee includes representatives from across Kentucky who advocate to advance open initiatives by hosting an annual Open Education Week symposium, collecting OER usage data for the Commonwealth, and pursuing grants meant to fund collaborative OER support projects.

Infrastructure for OER publishing continues to grow in Kentucky. KYVL has a consortial membership with the Open Education Network which provides member institutions access to the [Manifold publishing platform](#) at no cost. The State Assisted Academic Library Council of Kentucky (SAALCK) consortium, consisting of all Kentucky state universities and colleges, signed a three-year contract in 2022 with the open publishing platform Pressbooks to provide consortium members access to digital publishing tools and a digital book hosting platform. Since then, five books have been published in the [SAALCK Pressbooks](#) catalog with many more on the way.

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTIONS



Berea College In spring 2023, a group of faculty and administrators from Berea College attended the American Association of Colleges & Universities Institute on Open Educational Resources, and the culmination of this program was the creation of a new Open Educational Resources Librarian position job description and hiring to fill the role in summer 2023. The purpose of this role is to facilitate the evaluation and implementation of open and affordable resources and collaborate with faculty, library staff, and other campus partners to promote the adoption of OER. Berea joined the Open Education Network in fall 2023 and has provided workshops and consultations for faculty to promote OER adoption throughout the fall 2023 and spring 2024 semesters. The OER Faculty Advisory Group was created in fall 2023 to create OER grant requirements, evaluate proposals, and select funding recipients. Additional goals include providing guidance for integrating OER into the promotion and tenure process and collecting and compiling data related to the use of open and zero cost educational resources at Berea College. The inaugural OER grant call for proposals was announced in spring 2024 to provide stipends for instructors who adopt, adapt, and create OER for use in Berea College courses. In May 2024, the first in a series of workshops will be offered for faculty with topics such as Creative Commons licensing and open pedagogy. In the coming year, goals include increasing marketing to the campus community and expanding support for OER adaptation and creation.



Bluegrass Community and Technical College An internal grant to the Library for BCTC's [Affordable Learning Incentive Program](#) (ALIP)

awarded funds for stipends in 2023/24 to faculty who adopted OERs and put those online courses through the college's quality assurance process for distance learning courses. The ALIP focuses on education about OER for faculty, encouraging them to review OERs and working with 10 to 12 faculty to implement OER in zero-textbook-cost (ZTC) courses in shareable Blackboard Ultra course shells. While these activities are in progress however, establishing procedures with faculty and staff to share information on completed OER adoptions with each other and students has been as challenging as the adoptions themselves. A few BCTC faculty, working independently, have used OER in part or in whole for years prior to the grant but had no way to advertise their courses as low- or zero-cost, and no one knew to track student success data rates in ZTC sections for comparison with sections using commercial textbooks. Identifying and marketing these courses already converted to ZTC have been added to the ALIP's goals, along with ways to mark ZTC sections in the schedule of classes. The analysis of the effects of adoption on student success is the third focus of the ALIP, as part of the college's overall strategy to improve student success with innovative projects. The grant funding also covers the costs of one half-time staff member in the library to track OER adoptions and assist faculty; funding past June 2024 for any part of the ALIP is uncertain.



Eastern Kentucky University After publishing its first OER in 2019, [Slavery to Liberation: The African American Experience](#), and offering over \$75 thousand dollars in faculty incentive grants to 36 faculty members from 2020-2022, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) increased its commitment to Open Education in 2023 by hiring an Open Strategies Librarian. This librarian focuses exclusively on furthering open education practices by raising awareness of OERs through faculty and student education, supporting OER authors, maintaining previously published materials, and supporting faculty in open pedagogy and OER adoption. EKU maintains a working relationship with the Open Education Network with library representatives serving in leadership roles on the Publishing Advisory Group and Pub 101. To support OER publication, EKU is piloting the platform Manifold and the authoring tool Ketida, and exploring a new platform, Scifree Dynamica. To date, EKU has published three open textbooks and two adapted collections and hosts several open access journals in its [Encompass Digital Archive](#). EKU has two open textbooks in the editing stage, several in the writing stage, and a new behavioral disorder journal forthcoming.



Morehead State University In early 2023, Morehead State University embarked on integrating OER with a committee formed to participate in the American Association of College and Universities' Institute on Open Educational Resources. Following live trainings and discussions, an action plan was devised, with responsibilities distributed based on individual roles within the institution. This initiative will be presented at the fiscal year's end. Currently, efforts focus on gathering faculty data on OER experiences and aspirations, alongside collaborative development of professional programs covering Creative Commons, copyright law, and OER dissemination. Goals for the year include increased faculty engagement with OER, enhanced integration of library resources in course development, and preparation of faculty to author OER. Future strategies aim

to establish cost-effective programs for student retention. Despite financial constraints, the library's OER efforts are managed by librarians Stacy Scott and Lucinda Ward, who are creating a tailored Pressbook OER and pursuing Creative Commons certification to enhance community understanding of OER legalities.



Murray State University Outside of the parameters of materials which are openly licensed or public domain, Murray State University has acknowledged the issue of textbook and course material costs through a few different campus efforts that are not centrally coordinated. The [Staff Congress Foundation](#) begun offering a named textbook scholarship to assist Murray State staff members and their dependents with obtaining textbooks needed to pursue their degrees at Murray State up to the amount of \$250. Within the Libraries, the Dean of Libraries initiated promoting the use of library-owned eBooks as course-adopted textbooks in 2018. In 2023, the [university-run bookstore](#) began an “inclusive access” program, which is on an opt-out basis. The [LibGuide](#) for this offering provides four different current examples. Inside the parameters of the more classical definition of OER, the scholarly communication librarian has identified three potential faculty champions that are in various stages of starting their open ed journey. The Libraries also began offering a campus wide donor-name award for [Open Access Initiatives](#) in 2018 which expanded its scope in 2021 to include OER creators or adopters under a widened umbrella of Open Scholarship Practitioners.



Northern Kentucky University Northern Kentucky University (NKU) launched its own OER program initiative in 2021 after joining the Institute on Open Educational Resources hosted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. During the one-year commitment, a cross-unit team led by library representatives developed an action plan to grow a campus culture of open education aligned with the University's strategic plan. To meet this goal, in 2022 the Library hired its first full-time OER Librarian and piloted an [OER Instructor Grant program](#) supporting instructors through the process of adoption or adaptation of OER materials to use in NKU courses. Currently in its second cycle, the grant program has supported 33 courses, impacting nearly 1000 NKU students who have saved approximately \$95,000 in one semester of implementation. The OER program also offers one-on-one consultative support and supplies faculty curated lists of promising OER for adoption. The infrastructure for the OER program continues to grow in 2024 with plans to support more instructors with the adoption, adaptation, and creation of OER.



University of Kentucky Interest in and usage of OER is rapidly expanding at UK. The library's current strategic plan includes expanding the offerings of open and affordable course materials; the Affordable Course Content Committee, started in 2022, is charged with implementation of this initiative. UK joined the Open Education Network as an institutional member in 2023. Also in 2023, the institution hired an Affordable Course Content Librarian, the first role there devoted full-time to OER and textbook affordability. But this work is by no means new; the [OER Grant Program](#) (previously

named the Alternative Textbook Grant Program) started in 2016. Since then, it has awarded grants totaling over \$110,000 to more than 60 faculty, resulting in an estimated savings for students of over \$1.5 million. The grant program is managed by the library and an advisory group of faculty and staff from all over campus. Future projects include a workshop series and surveys of UK students and faculty.



University of Louisville Since the launch of the UofL Libraries Affordable Learning and Open Educational Resources (OER) initiative in 2023, the Affordable Learning and OER Workgroup, which includes representatives from diverse campus constituencies such as the Office of the Provost, Student Success Center, Center for Teaching and Learning, Student Government Association (SGA), and Office of Institutional Effectiveness, has hosted two professional development events for faculty, implemented course notes that label low-cost or no-cost course materials in the schedule of classes, promoted the course notes and OER via multiple campus communication channels, and supported the SGA's decision to pass an Affordable Learning Bill that encourages the use of OER and affordable course materials. In Spring 2024, 147 course sections used the course notes, resulting in an estimated student savings of over \$206,000. Additionally, SAALCK's subscription to Pressbooks allowed for the publication of an open [business communication textbook](#), saving students an additional \$64,000 in one academic year (2023-2024). The near-future plans for the workgroup include increasing the adoption, adoption, and creation of OER and use of existing library resources as primary textbooks, conducting a faculty needs assessment, expanding the utilization of course notes, extensive outreach and marketing, and providing professional development opportunities for faculty.



Transylvania University Transylvania University Library is committed to making required course readings more affordable and accessible to our students. To further this goal, librarians assist faculty to learn more about what OERs are and how to use them. The library maintains an OER LibGuide for faculty which contains facts, links to resources, steps on how to adopt OER into courses, and information about copyright laws, fair use, and Creative Commons. In the Spring of 2023 librarians presented on OER basics, current usage of OER by Transylvania faculty, and library support to faculty and staff at an Academic Affairs meeting. In 2023-24 Transylvania supported a panel presentation for faculty on OERs, what they are, and why students benefit from them. This panel included TU librarians and faculty and was part of an ongoing series supported by the Digital Liberal Arts (DLA) Committee on incorporating technology into the classroom. The DLA Committee also offers grants for course development, including funds to create OERs for a course.



Western Kentucky University Western Kentucky University began its commitment to Open Educational Resources in 2020 with the creation of the [Affordable Textbook Program](#). This program provided grants for faculty who adapted OER to replace traditional classroom materials. In 2022 WKU Libraries hired an OER Librarian to expand the grant

program and provide workshops and consultations for those interested in OER and affordable course materials. Since then, the program has changed and grown to include four different tiers of possible participation. Faculty can now choose between adoption, adaption, creation, and a multi-section conversion, which allows up to five faculty to work together to lower textbook costs for high enrollment courses. Last year's awardees include three faculty who have started to develop workbooks to be included in the SAALCK Pressbooks catalog. To increase awareness and the number of incentives available for faculty, WKU libraries have occasionally partnered with campus groups like the [Center For Innovative Teaching and Learning](#) and The [Kelly M. Burch Institute for Transformative Practices in Higher Education](#). To date 22 awards have saved our students over half a million dollars.

CONCLUSION

REFLECTIONS AND CHALLENGES

As the OER movement continues to gain traction, it is not immune to the challenges felt throughout higher education. As with any ground-up initiative, OER programs must vie for awareness, funding support, and buy-in from institutional leadership. While libraries continue to grow OER programs, some institutions look to inclusive access programs as an alternative to the traditional textbook marketplace. Inclusive access is a threat to faculty motivation to adopt OER since both options can save students money. However, inclusive access programs do not provide the same benefits as OER; the resources are not free to students. In addition, inclusive access creates student confusion over textbook purchases, has complicated opt-out policies, and leads to fears of over reliance on a single vendor who may raise program prices after consumers are hooked (Cullier).

It continues to be the responsibility of library professionals to encourage teaching faculty to prioritize OER adoption and creation over competing interests, and faculty are increasingly interested. An increase in OER education, support, and stipends can serve as

motivation to adopt or create OER (Hollister & Patton), placing libraries in a strong position to continue growing the movement. These opportunities bring challenges, including low and unstable funding for stipends, as the amount on offer is rarely enough to fairly compensate the work done, and in many institutions, the creation of educational materials by faculty is overlooked or undervalued during the tenure and promotion process. One solution is encouraging updated tenure and promotion guidelines to specifically include OER and the expansion of peer review opportunities for created OER.

NEXT STEPS

Kentucky has a strong and growing OER community; however, further strengthening and expanding the community of library professionals and creating a state-wide OER infrastructure to further support faculty in adopting, adapting, and creating OER are ongoing processes. OER saves students money and benefits the students from historically underserved and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds the most (Colvard et al. 262-264; Jenkins et al. 2-4), but redistributive justice through student savings is not the only social justice focus. Increasingly, OER work in Kentucky includes a greater understanding, appreciation, and integration of recognitive justice, which emphasizes diversity of content, and representational justice, which centers the perspectives of marginalized and minoritized groups and people.

The last few years, librarians in the Commonwealth have built a strong community based around common initiatives and coordinated efforts to further OER interest and understanding. Our next steps include working together to apply for grants and other funding that can take our efforts to the next level. We look forward to sharing our unbridled spirit, knowledge, and excitement with all those who are interested, to ensure the best outcome for students in Kentucky.

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