

The E is for Equity: Building an O.E.R. and affordable textbooks movement on a community college campus¹

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Abstract

OER adoption is an opportunity to change the unsustainable commercial textbook model and mitigate equity issues that are particularly challenging to community college students. Leveraging the expertise of three librarians from Berkeley City College, this session discussed high impact practices to build an OER movement by connecting to existing equity and affordability initiatives and utilizing tools you already have at your library. Panelists shared successful strategies (and failures) in going after grants, and engaging with faculty, students, and administrators, in building a nascent OER community of practice. We showed examples of the OER-to-commercial textbook comparison tool we developed that helped to convince faculty to adopt OER texts. We discussed results from student and faculty surveys, and showed examples of how we stipended instructors. We discussed potential reasons *why* faculty shy away from using OER texts and strategies to help overcome this obstacle.

¹ This session was originally submitted as a panel presentation but our session was actually more of an Engaging in Practice session. This document reflects that change and follows the conventions of an Engaging in Practice session.

Summary

Introduction

Textbook costs are a common barrier to students accessing and succeeding in a course and the existing educational model of using commercial textbooks is unsustainable. A 2012 report showed that in order to mitigate the \$1200 average annual cost for textbooks, students cope by not registering for a course, taking fewer courses, or dropping or withdrawing from a course². Community college students face unprecedented challenges both in and out of the classroom--homelessness, caring for children, and working full time, just to name a few. OER adoption is an opportunity to change the traditional textbook model and mitigate equity issues that are particularly challenging to this population.

Context

Leveraging the expertise of three librarians from Berkeley City College, we discussed how we framed OER as an equity and access issue on our campus and how we are building grassroots support for OER from librarians, teaching faculty, students, and administrators. Embracing the fact that the library's central role is to provide access to information, we took a risk by fearlessly championing open access textbooks in high impact courses (courses with more than four sections and costly textbooks) such as chemistry, history, psychology, and mathematics, knowing that students' access to these courses was more important than our circulation statistics. Working with our small team of librarians, we created and presented faculty with comparisons between traditional textbooks and similar OER texts. We met frequently with important players in our developing OER ecosystem by attending department meetings, meeting with department chairs, and meeting with administrators who oversee equity and learning communities to help put OER into our college's educational master plan. We applied for, and now oversee, two grant programs to encourage OER use on our campus, and we are slowly, but steadily, working to build support from faculty and administration for textbook affordability. During this presentation, we shared successful strategies (and failures) in going after grants, and engaging with faculty, students, and administrators, in building a nascent OER community of practice.

Practical take-aways

We first asked attendees to talk about why their library should be involved in OER to stimulate discussion and gather baseline knowledge of OER. We then shared our own effective strategies for OER advocacy from the very beginning of our movement to the present day. We led a discussion about why we got involved in OER which was for practical reasons--we purchase textbooks so students can check them out and they are very expensive. We discussed the financial challenges our students face which was the big impetus for us to champion OER. We then discussed how tools we have at our disposal as librarians were used to frame our initial presentations about OER--such as circulation data, book costs, and student feedback about textbook costs. We discussed potential reasons *why* faculty shy away from using OER texts and strategies to help overcome this obstacle. We then showed examples of the OER-to-commercial

² Donaldson, R.L., Nelson, D.W., & Thomas, E. (2012). *2012 Florida Student Textbook Survey*. Retrieved from Florida Virtual Campus Website: https://florida.theorange grove.org/og/file/10c0c9f5-fa58-2869-4fd9-af67fec26387/1/2012_Florida_Student_Textbook_Survey.pdf

textbook comparison tool we developed that helped us convince faculty members to adopt OER texts. We also showed attendees the infrastructure that we developed for our OER work. The goal of our presentation was to help attendees think critically about how to create a targeted outreach plan and to leave with inspiration for presenting a compelling argument for OER on their campuses.