
CAPSTONE FINAL REPORT

OPEN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

SPARC*

Developing a Programmatic Assessment Plan for
the Use of Open and Affordable Course Materials at
Fitchburg State University

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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to develop a programmatic assessment plan for open and affordable course materials which includes strategies for implementation. The plan consists of two components. First, is the draft assessment plan which includes metrics that align with the [Massachusetts Board of Higher Education proposed metrics](#) which are based on the [Open Education Group's COUP Framework](#). The second part of the document, and the substantial portion of the document, is the strategies for implementation. For each metric, I identified 3 areas for consideration:

- Decisions to be made
- Establishing baseline data with examples
- Establishing target goals

The strategies for implementation was a useful thought exercise that allowed me to think through pertinent questions and how I might approach collecting and analyzing the data.

Project Overview

My capstone project is an alignment of my interest in program assessment, a new university strategic plan that references Open and Affordable course materials, and indication from the Massachusetts State-Wide OER Advisory Committee that they were going to recommend that universities report a variety of metrics that documents their OER efforts. These synergistic efforts led to my decision to pursue the development of a programmatic assessment plan for Fitchburg State University.

Background Information

Fitchburg State University (FSU) is in its early stages of OER adoption. In 2018, an OER advisory group was formed to explore whether the university should encourage use of Open and Affordable course materials. Recognizing the importance of this initiative, a formal committee was created in 2019. Over the last 2 years, the university has made some strong strides in advancing open education on our campus, including the funding of 22 adoption grants, 3 creation grants, and establishing a community of practice. More importantly, open and affordable course materials have been incorporated into our strategic plan with two core tenets of being a student ready university and commitment to educational justice. It has also received significant treatment in the university's NECHE self-report.

Given the growing commitment by the university to open and affordable course materials, it seemed prudent to develop a programmatic assessment plan so we can measure the growth, use, and effectiveness of open and affordable course materials at FSU. Coupled with this initiative, the Massachusetts OER Advisory Committee was developing a proposal containing key performance indicators (KPIs) that each institution and the state as a whole could use to measure the impact of our efforts. While these KPIs have not yet been implemented at the state level, the timing seemed right for me to use the SPARC capstone as an opportunity to develop an assessment plan for FSU - a plan which could also serve as a prototype for other universities or colleges.

Identifying the Performance Metrics

The assessment plan contains goals accompanied by measurable objectives. Because I wanted to align our plan with the proposed KPIs being suggested by the state, identifying the measurable objectives ended up being fairly easy. The State was using

the Open Education Group's [COUP framework](#) as a model and I was provided with a draft of their proposed metrics. With that information, I was able to draft a goal statement and align their proposed metrics to the goal. I did add some additional objectives related to return on investment for OER grant incentives, faculty use of open educational materials (broken out by adoption, adaption, and creation) and faculty perceptions. These metrics will be useful in helping us understand the faculty perspective and use of open materials on our campus.

Baseline and Target Goals

In my capstone proposal, I had indicated that the assessment plan would have baseline data and target goals. I realized early on that I was not going to be able to incorporate these elements immediately. Given the newness of our program, we did not yet have enough data to establish a baseline. It is important to calculate baseline data so the institution knows the current status of its initiatives. Ideally, I would have at least 2 years of data to help ensure that my baseline calculation is not an anomaly (i.e. years in which OER use is out of the normal range). We are currently finishing up our first year of data collection.

Without baseline data, I could not establish target goals which identifies the level of progress the organization believes it can achieve in a specified timeframe. It provides a framework for what success may look like. I initially thought target goals would be relatively easy. I thought there would be a standard number or percent that could uniformly be used when setting a target or stretch. For example, a 5% increase is a reasonable target with a stretch being an increase of 7%. However, through my research, I was not finding information to support this. I ultimately realized target goals are unique to each institution and a set number or target cannot be universally applied.

While this sounds dour, it was not as bad as it seemed. The conceptual framework for the assessment plan was intact. The goals and objectives are the heart of the plan. I presented the draft plan (minus target goals) to the University Open and Affordable Education Committee and with some minor revisions, they endorsed the plan's framework.

Strategies for Implementation

As I was working on the assessment plan and thinking about how it would be implemented, I started asking myself a lot of questions. For example, when working on

the metrics that looks at faculty professional development, questions I pondered included:

By 2025, the number of faculty participating in OER professional development opportunities will increase from X% to Y%

1. What is considered a professional development opportunity?
2. Will each professional development opportunity be weighted equally?
 - a. Is a semester-long community of practice which requires a 8 hour commitment equivalent to a one hour information session about No/Low materials?
3. What is the culture for professional development at your institution?
 - a. Do faculty take advantage of and participate in professional development opportunities?
 - b. Does the institution offer many professional development opportunities? Would my development programs end up competing against other professional development opportunities?
4. What is a realistic expectation of the number of professional development opportunities that No/Low advocates can offer during an academic year?

These seem like very basic questions but as I started asking one question, I found it often led to more questions that I hadn't initially considered. Ultimately, my capstone project turned into a thought exercise. As I reviewed each metric, I listed questions that need to be considered. From there, I outlined how I would go about collecting the baseline data. Oftentimes, I would outline multiple ways to collect data based on answers to my questions. In the professional development metric, I documented how you would collect data if all professional development opportunities were weighted equally and by number of hours faculty spent in professional development -which recognizes that not all professional development opportunities are the same. Lastly I documented considerations to be made when establishing a target goal.

So while I didn't end up with a fully completed assessment plan, I feel like I have a good grasp of how I will collect baseline data and develop the target goals. I am planning to present the plan to the University Academic Affairs team on May 26, 2021. As well, I have the opportunity to share my work with the Massachusetts State-Wide OER Advisory committee on May 17, 2021. Their feedback and thoughts will further inform the assessment plan.

Evaluation

Although I didn't end up developing a complete assessment plan like I had planned, overall I am satisfied with the work I did for my capstone project. Assessment is challenging and hard. However, I am a firm believer in the importance of taking time to review the progress of a program.

This is a long-term project. Once the assessment plan is fully developed, the real work begins. In the short-term, I need to establish a baseline. I have data from this past academic year and likely will continue to collect baseline data during AY21-22. Once I feel like I have a solid baseline, I will develop the target goals.

The next level of success is analyzing the data to determine whether progress has been made in achieving the target goals. In addition to the analysis is identifying whether any changes in strategy need to be made to continue making progress (closing the loop).

Long term success will be replicating the data collection on an annual basis so that it becomes sustainable and we can continually track and understand the progression or regression of the use of open and affordable course materials at FSU.

Ultimate success is seeing systematic and sustained growth of OER at Fitchburg State University demonstrated through an assessment plan.

Lessons Learned

Be open to learning what you don't know and embrace it.

I went into the capstone thinking that I had a clear plan and all of the information that I needed. Realizing that percentages for target goals are not as universal as I had first thought was challenging. However it allowed me to realize the uniqueness of every programmatic assessment plan. I had also gone into the process thinking I might be able to use 1 semester of data to establish a baseline but in consulting with the Associate VP for Institutional Research and Planning, I learned that the best case scenario is two years of baseline data but at least 1 year of data is needed.

Instead of proceeding forward with a less than ideal data collection plan or giving up on the project, I embraced what I learned and then channeled my energies into the strategies for implementation which will be incredibly useful once the plan is implemented.

It takes a village

I feel very fortunate to have a strong support network. Jillian Maynard, my SPARC mentor, and I met every two weeks to discuss progress. I was able to show her my work, receive feedback, and learn from her. I feel fortunate to know her and look forward to future collaborations with her. My dean, Jacalyn Kremer, is a huge OER advocate and provided useful feedback which helped me to better define the objectives in the assessment plan. She is also a strong ambassador for OER at the campus level and state-wide level and has been able to open doors for me to share my work. She was able to get me on the agenda for the State-wide OER Advisory Board and the university's academic affairs team to share my work. The University's Open and Affordable Education committee provided thoughtful feedback and not only endorsed but were excited about the assessment plan. Having all of this support not only made for a better assessment plan but also makes me feel confident that this assessment plan will be a living document that will help the university in demonstrating its commitment to the use of open and affordable course materials in the classroom.



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