
CAPSTONE FINAL REPORT

OPEN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Library Outreach for Inclusive Open Education

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May 12, 2019

Abstract

This final report shares the process and outcomes of my SPARC Open Education Leadership capstone project. My high-level goal for this capstone project was to establish a new approach for open education outreach in my work and at my institution, focused on inclusion and diversity in open education. Other goals included increasing my own knowledge, confidence, and self-efficacy in engaging and supporting faculty to use open education to make their courses and teaching more inclusive. Building on conversations with faculty and gathering resources on inclusive teaching and open education, I have created a community resource to share what I have learned and to help other librarians prepare to incorporate or lead with inclusion in their open education outreach. The resource includes readings and viewings that can help librarians build some foundational knowledge about inclusive teaching and open education, guidance and resources for preparing and having conversations with faculty, and guidance on ways that inclusion can be incorporated throughout the process of adapting and authoring OER.



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Project Overview

Open education efforts at many institutions have focused largely on affordability and cost savings. In many places, this has been effective in gaining interest from administration, engagement from faculty, and obvious support from students. That OER are free of cost is a benefit that is simple to explain and one that addresses a pressing student need that is obvious to many. However, focusing on affordability and cost savings does not fully represent the benefits of OER and open education. Critically, it does not strongly set OER apart from commercial course materials providers who co-opt open language and who are beginning to offer lower-cost resources or new financial models meant to capitalize on efforts to address affordability in higher education. While my institution has seen success in making the case for affordability through engagement of administration and faculty, there is more we can do to communicate the full range of possibilities that open education can provide for both faculty and students.

At the start of preparation for the capstone project, I knew I wanted to propose a project related to equity, inclusion, and diversity. Just as my work on my first idea for a project was about to begin (a project larger in scale and scope than my own daily work or library initiatives), I participated in a test bank sprint for an open textbook. For my part, I reviewed questions for grammar, spelling, and clarity. Many of the questions included a hypothetical scenario or person, and I started to wonder about potential issues of inclusion and diversity. What names and pronouns were selected for specific scenarios? If I were asked to choose a name and gender to represent a hypothetical person to match a profession or a scenario, what would I choose? Who's a caterer, and who's a CEO? Who's an entrepreneur with a genius startup idea, and who's an employee engaging in unethical behavior?

What ways, big and small, incidental and fundamental, might bias exist in OER? OER can easily replicate the same issues of traditional textbooks and materials: bias, stereotyping, misrepresentation, and exclusion of people and narratives outside the disciplinary "canon." For this project, I wanted to begin to answer the question: what can I as a librarian do to ensure that OER, especially those I work directly to help create, are inclusive, representative of those who will be learning with them, and designed to be improved when they fall short?

Many faculty already recognize that OER provide an opportunity for greater diversity and inclusivity and are engaging with OER for this purpose. BCcampus asked educators at BC post-secondary institutions for what purposes they used OER, and 15% said "To make their teaching more culturally diverse" (p. 14). Respondents slightly agreed that in using OER they "Make use of more culturally diverse resources" (3.24 out of 5 on a Likert scale) (pp. 25-26). When asked to "describe, in their own words, what 'openness' in education meant to them," 10% of respondents gave an answer on the theme of "openness to a diversity of



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perspectives” (p. 28).¹ The OER Research Hub at the UK Open University also asked educators for what purposes they use OER, and 28.2% said “To make my teaching more culturally diverse” (p. 74). They also highlighted that this can happen in reverse; faculty who engage with OER may also find that it leads them to evaluate and change their practices: “A similarly under-reported benefit for educators is the manner in which OER cause them to reflect on their own practice, and to broaden their teaching approaches. The use of OER is often couched in terms of benefit to the learner, but the impact on educators could be equally significant” (p. 76).²

During this project, I found that some faculty at my institution are also already aware of or engaging with OER for the benefit of making their materials more inclusive and reflective of their students’ perspectives. Other faculty who haven’t yet engaged with OER are still working around textbooks and materials that are not inclusive, by identifying supplementary materials that fill in gaps or even correct misrepresentations. In one-on-one conversations with faculty, I sought to learn how they approach or how they might like to approach inclusive teaching, how (and if) they assess course materials for inclusivity, and how they have incorporated or plan to incorporate inclusion into their work with OER. A general observation was a general feeling that traditional textbooks and materials will nearly always fall short of being truly inclusive. Too many contain only the dominant narrative of a discipline or topic, and too few represent the diversities found in our classrooms. Examples of promising ideas and practices from faculty included building in assignments to the course that ask students to identify topics and perspectives they value or relate to the most and creating OER to serve as the alternative canon for disciplines where traditional materials regularly fail to challenge dominant narratives.

To build on these conversations, I sought to find resources that I could use to educate myself and share with faculty who want to engage with OER as a way to make their teaching and courses more inclusive. If an instructor wanted to adopt more inclusive and diverse resources, or if they wanted to adapt or author OER with a goal of increasing inclusivity, how can I help? The community resource I created contains many of the resources I used to build my own knowledge. It reflects the results of my own learning process and how I plan to use what I’ve learned to engage with and support faculty in the future. It includes some readings and viewings that I found integral to my understanding of how traditional course materials fall short of inclusivity and ways that open education can be used to for inclusive teaching.

¹ Jhangiani, R. S., Pitt, R., Hendricks, C., Key, J., & Lalonde, C. (2016). Exploring faculty use of open educational resources at British Columbia post-secondary institutions. BCCampus Research Report. Victoria, BC: BCCampus.

² Weller, M, de los Arcos, B, Farrow, R, Pitt, R, and McAndrew, P. 2017. What Can OER Do for Me? Evaluating the Claims for OER. In: Jhangiani, R S and Biswas-Diener, R. (eds.) Open: The Philosophy and Practices that are Revolutionizing Education and Science. Pp. 67–77. London: Ubiquity Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bbc.e>. License: CC-BY 4.0



Evaluation

I set out in this project with a goal to establish a new approach for open education outreach in my work. To do this, my first goal was to learn how faculty think about and approach inclusive teaching, assess course materials for inclusivity, and incorporate inclusion into their work with OER. And although I learned a lot, I know I have only scratched the surface of faculty knowledge and experience. The faculty perspectives I learned from, while diverse, were limited to my institution and faculty already knowledgeable about OER. However, by starting new kinds of conversations with existing faculty connections, I have developed knowledge and skills that I will use for future faculty conversations.

I purposefully limited the scope of my project to building my own knowledge and confidence, starting conversations and new collaborations, and building a community resource that can help librarians incorporate inclusion into their open education outreach and prepare them to educate and support faculty. However, I did hope that I would be able to move farther in this process, for example, by turning parts of the community resource into more polished faculty-facing resources. My hope is that this resource can serve as a starting point for other librarians to incorporate inclusion into their open education outreach and prepare to have conversations and with faculty about inclusive teaching and course materials. There is plenty of work ahead to build on this project. I recognize that the community resource is just a first draft that will constantly evolve as I continue to learn and receive feedback. In particular, I feel that most of the individual sections in the resource could turn into larger resources themselves, and none of the sections are as in-depth as I plan for them to be after future revisions. I intend to add more illustrative examples from a broad range of disciplines to fill out some of the sections that are currently covered less in-depth than others. My hope is that others will build on it to add their own knowledge and perspectives, and that I and others can build faculty-facing resources to support the creation of inclusive open educational resources.

One of the goals I set was to identify multiple potential partners and collaborations and to secure at least one commitment for future action. I was a little nervous about meeting this goal because it was dependent on a few things: identifying a role that inclusion, open education, and I could play within someone else's initiatives or priorities; my ability to communicate the connection between open education and inclusion; and lastly to get someone to say yes to my proposal (which was totally outside of my control!). However, I have identified more opportunities for outreach than I expected. These are opportunities that, prior to this project, I might not have seen as having a strong connection with open education or where I might have led my outreach with affordability rather than inclusion.



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Additionally, I have plans for at least two future collaborations for faculty outreach and education.

Lessons Learned

Recognize where you are right now and where you want to go, then “take the next most elegant step” (this beautiful phrase and concept courtesy of [Gibrán Rivera and adrienne maree brown](#)). My initial ideas for my capstone were all big enough that it was hard to find an appropriate scope for this capstone project. I had high-level, long-term goals for what I want to accomplish, but I needed to figure out what was the right step right now. It took time, but I realized that my first step to success was to build my own knowledge, confidence, and self-efficacy to engage in this work. The next step is sharing this project and so that I can continue to build on it.

Take time to plan and strategize, especially when starting something new to you, your library, or your institution. What are your goals? What do people want and need? What opportunities for outreach and collaboration exist? I was tempted throughout the project to charge forward beyond the scope of this project: faculty conversations, initial steps at building relationships, and creation of the community resource to help guide my next steps. However, these steps were important to build a strong foundation on which I could build bigger library initiatives and partnerships with others.

Find the unique role that you can play. Although scope creep was always looming over this project, I did my best to focus on what unique role I can play in my institution because I can't and do not have to do everything. For example, I do not need to become the go-to campus resource on inclusive teaching in order to encourage and support faculty I work with to make the OER they use and create more inclusive, and there are an amazing group of people throughout my institution who are engaged in initiatives related to inclusive teaching that I can collaborate with. No librarian or OER advocate can fill in every role needed for a successful open education initiative or even a single OER project, and the more diverse experiences and perspectives brought to the table, the more successful an initiative or project will be.

