Open Exchange: Adaptation or “Sanitization”? Exploring the Boundaries of Open Education

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https://www.cccoer.org/webinar/open-exchange-adaptation-or-sanitization/

This summary was generated using Zoom AI and ChatGPT. It has been edited by CCCOER staff to remove participant names and identifying details. The webinar was not recorded to encourage open conversation and participation.

Key takeaways

- The adaptation of an OpenStax sociology textbook in Florida raised concerns about censorship, academic freedom, attribution, and the potential misuse of openly licensed educational materials.
- Open licensing permits adaptation, including changes that original authors may strongly disagree with. Participants explored the tension between maintaining openness and protecting the integrity of educational content.
- Clear attribution, version histories, and documentation of changes are important for transparency, but consistent implementation and enforcement remain challenges.
- Creative Commons licensing choices, particularly NoDerivatives (ND) licenses, involve trade-offs between allowing adaptation and providing authors with greater control over their work.
- Faculty face different levels of risk when responding to restrictions on educational content, particularly adjunct and contingent faculty whose employment may depend on complying with institutional requirements.
- Legal action to address potential licensing violations can be costly and may have unintended consequences for educators and institutions.
- The open education community has opportunities to move beyond technical licensing discussions toward advocacy, collective action, and stronger support for educators and students.
- Trust, reciprocity, and community responsibility emerged as essential considerations for the future of open education.
- Participants emphasized that concerns about misuse should not discourage the creation and use of OER, whose benefits remain significant.

Open Exchange: Adaptation or “Sanitization”? Exploring the Boundaries of Open Education by the Community College Consortium for OER is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Discussed topics

Florida's adapted sociology textbook: Context and concerns

The session began with an overview of the adaptation of an OpenStax *Introduction to Sociology* textbook for use in Florida. The original textbook was approximately 669 pages, while the revised version was approximately 267 pages. The adaptation removed substantial content addressing race, gender, and sexuality, raising questions about whether the resulting textbook adequately represented the field of sociology.

Representatives from OpenStax participated in the discussion and provided context about the situation and the organization's response.

Details

- Participants discussed how removing foundational concepts from a sociology textbook differs from adapting educational materials to meet specific teaching needs.
- OpenStax representatives expressed concern about the removal of essential subject matter while noting that the original, unedited textbook remains freely available through OpenStax.
- Participants questioned whether the adapted textbook provided adequate attribution and a clear path back to the original resource.
- A PDF identified as a possible version of the adapted textbook was located during the chat. Participants examined its attribution language, but questions remained about whether it represented the final version and whether attribution requirements were fully met.
- Participants discussed the broader policy environment in Florida, including changes affecting sociology as a general education subject and institutional restrictions on instructional materials.
- Some questioned whether the state-mandated use of a revised textbook effectively undermined the academic freedom that open licensing is intended to support.

Conclusion

The Florida textbook situation illustrated how the freedoms provided by open licensing can be used in ways that raise serious educational and ethical concerns. Participants distinguished between legitimate adaptation for pedagogical purposes and changes that remove fundamental disciplinary content.

What does it mean to be “open”?

A central discussion focused on whether openness should permit adaptations that conflict with an author's intentions or the values of the open education community.

Details

- Participants compared open licensing to freedom of expression, recognizing that both can enable outcomes that some people find objectionable.
- Some argued that allowing broad adaptation is fundamental to Open Education. Restricting uses based on disagreement with their content could introduce new forms of censorship.
- Others questioned whether openness should be treated as an absolute ideal without considering the potential harm caused by certain adaptations.
- Participants explored whether openness exists on a spectrum and whether different licensing approaches can serve different educational and ethical needs.
- The conversation highlighted a tension between granting users freedom to adapt materials and preserving the educational integrity of the original work.
- Several participants encouraged the community to discuss openness with greater nuance rather than presenting unrestricted adaptation as inherently beneficial.

Conclusion

There was no consensus on where the boundaries of openness should lie. Participants recognized that the freedoms associated with open education bring both opportunities and responsibilities, and that these questions deserve continued examination.

Creative Commons licensing and author protections

Participants considered how licensing choices might protect authors and educational materials from unwanted adaptations.

Details

- NoDerivatives (ND) licensing received particular attention because it restricts the sharing of adapted versions without additional permission.
- Some participants supported considering ND licenses when authors have concerns about their work being substantially altered or misrepresented.
- Others cautioned that limiting adaptation may undermine an important benefit of OER and could establish precedents for restricting legitimate educational uses.
- An example was shared of authors choosing a license that restricts adaptations while remaining open to granting individual permissions after discussion.
- Participants suggested that authors using ND licenses could include contact information and explicitly invite requests for adaptation.
- The distinction between openly accessible resources and OER meeting the commonly recognized 5R permissions was discussed.
- Participants also raised questions about moral rights, copyright enforcement, and how licensing choices interact with fair use.

Conclusion

Licensing decisions should be made thoughtfully, with authors informed about both the opportunities and risks of adaptation. More guidance may be needed to help authors select licenses that align with their goals, concerns, and intended audiences.

Attribution, versioning, and transparency

The discussion explored how creators and users can better distinguish adapted resources from their original versions.

Details

- Participants emphasized that Creative Commons attribution requirements include indicating whether changes have been made.
- However, documenting changes is not consistently practiced, even when adaptations are created with good intentions.
- Participants described the difficulty of tracking multiple versions of a textbook, particularly when resources are repeatedly copied, revised, or republished.
- Suggested practices included maintaining version histories, linking to earlier and later editions, and providing acknowledgments that describe the nature and purpose of adaptations.
- Some institutions already incorporate version histories into their publishing workflows, but subsequent adapters may remove or fail to maintain this documentation.
- Participants expressed interest in clearer guidance, templates, and community standards for documenting adaptations.
- Questions emerged about who is responsible for ensuring attribution requirements are followed and what happens when those requirements are ignored.

Conclusion

Clearer versioning and attribution practices could improve transparency and help educators and students understand how a resource has changed. However, guidelines alone cannot guarantee that adapters will follow them.

Enforcement of open licenses

Participants discussed the practical challenges of responding when materials are used in ways that may violate licensing terms or misrepresent their original creators.

Details

- Participants questioned who is responsible for monitoring compliance with open licenses and taking action when violations occur.

- OpenStax representatives discussed the complexity of evaluating potential enforcement actions, including legal expenses, institutional considerations, and possible repercussions.
- The potential for legal challenges to draw additional attention to educators or institutions already facing political pressure was raised.
- Participants discussed how prior experiences in other states had informed concerns about the unintended consequences of public challenges.
- Some noted that copyright holders may have legal options but lack the resources or capacity to pursue them.
- The group distinguished between adaptations that are permitted under an open license but considered unethical and adaptations that may actually violate licensing terms.

Conclusion

License enforcement is neither simple nor risk-free. Legal rights, financial resources, institutional relationships, and the safety of affected educators all influence whether and how organizations respond.

Academic freedom and the experiences of educators

Discussion broadened to the impact of political and institutional restrictions on educators' ability to choose materials and teach course content.

Details

- Participants described situations in which faculty are required to use particular textbooks or follow prescribed instructional materials.
- Examples from Florida highlighted faculty resistance to restrictions on sociology instruction, including efforts to preserve the ability to teach with appropriate resources.
- Participants noted that faculty do not experience these pressures equally. Adjunct and contingent instructors may have less freedom to challenge requirements without risking employment.
- The conversation acknowledged the difficult choices educators face between publicly resisting restrictions and continuing to teach within existing constraints.
- Participants described how policies requiring public access to syllabi and course materials can create additional concerns about scrutiny and targeting.
- Some observed that restrictions on content can create a chilling effect, discouraging educators from addressing particular subjects or publishing materials that may attract attention.
- Participants from different institutional and regional contexts described varying levels of faculty autonomy over textbook selection.

Conclusion

Academic freedom is closely connected to educators' employment conditions, institutional policies, and political environments. Strategies that may be possible for some faculty are not necessarily safe or practical for others.

Trust, reciprocity, and community responsibility

As the conversation developed, participants considered whether the open education movement should place greater emphasis on relationships, shared values, and community responsibilities.

Details

- Participants described education as fundamentally dependent on trust between educators, students, authors, and institutions.
- Open education similarly relies on trust that materials will be reused and adapted responsibly, even when licensing permits a wide range of uses.
- The discussion raised questions about whether trust necessarily involves accepting the risk that others may use resources in ways their creators oppose.
- Some suggested expanding the traditional 5R framework to include reciprocity, drawing attention to existing discussions of the 6Rs of Indigenous OER.
- Participants explored whether using OER should also involve engaging with and contributing to the broader open education community.
- Several encouraged the field to consider advocacy for educational integrity, equity, and responsible scholarship as part of open education practice.
- The importance of recognizing multiple perspectives and documenting the histories of resources was emphasized.

Conclusion

Trust and reciprocity offer a way to think about open education beyond licensing permissions. Participants considered how the community might establish expectations for responsible reuse without undermining the freedoms that make OER valuable.

Advocacy and supporting educators

Participants moved from discussing the limitations of licensing toward identifying actions the open education community could take to support educators and students.

Details

- A central question was how educators and advocates outside Florida could support those navigating restrictions within the state.
- Participants emphasized the value of joining existing communities, attending events, sharing experiences, and contributing expertise.

- OPEN FL was identified as a community welcoming participation and support from colleagues beyond Florida.
- Suggested actions included volunteering as speakers, participating in advocacy efforts, and sharing examples of successful approaches from other institutions and states.
- Participants considered how adapted OER might offer educators flexibility in challenging environments, including the possibility of changing titles or presentation language to make resources more usable within restrictive institutional contexts.
- Others raised concerns that modifying language to avoid scrutiny could contribute to the normalization of censorship.
- The discussion acknowledged that educators working under restrictive policies may need to make pragmatic decisions that differ from what colleagues in other environments would choose.
- Participants also discussed student advocacy and the importance of involving students in conversations about educational resources and academic freedom.

Conclusion

Supporting educators requires listening to those directly affected and recognizing the risks they face. Participants encouraged collective advocacy while acknowledging that effective approaches may vary depending on local circumstances.

AI and the future of OER adaptation

Toward the end of the session, participants briefly considered how artificial intelligence introduces additional questions about open licensing, adaptation, and educational use.

Details

- Participants noted that AI can significantly accelerate the adaptation of educational materials, potentially amplifying both beneficial and harmful uses.
- Concerns were raised about AI companies using openly licensed content without consistently following licensing requirements.
- The discussion connected these issues to broader challenges of attribution, enforcement, and trust.
- An example was shared of faculty using OER textbooks with AI-powered tools to create interactive tutoring experiences for students.
- Participants questioned how these uses affect engagement with the original textbook and what guidance educators should provide.
- Some suggested examining similar ethical discussions within the open-source software community.

Conclusion

AI introduces additional complexity to existing conversations about adaptation and reuse. Participants recognized opportunities for innovative educational applications while identifying a need for clearer guidance on licensing, attribution, and pedagogy.

Challenges

- Balancing freedom to adapt OER with concerns about censorship, misrepresentation, and educational harm.
- Protecting academic freedom when institutions or governments restrict instructional materials.
- Supporting adjunct and contingent faculty who may have limited ability to challenge institutional requirements.
- Helping authors understand the potential consequences of different Creative Commons licenses.
- Maintaining accurate attribution and version histories across multiple adaptations.
- Determining when and how to enforce licensing requirements.
- Addressing the financial, legal, and professional risks of challenging problematic uses.
- Responding to political pressures without increasing risks for affected educators.
- Preventing fear of misuse from discouraging OER creation and sharing.
- Defining the responsibilities of the open education community beyond providing access to resources.
- Understanding how AI may influence the scale and nature of future adaptations.

Resources shared during the discussion

Florida sociology textbook and related background

- Inside Higher Ed: Florida Introduces a “Sanitized” Sociology Textbook
- Florida Department of Education: State Board of Education Removes Sociology from General Education in the Florida College System
- PDF of the revised sociology textbook shared during the discussion — Participants noted that this copy was marked as a draft, and its status as the final version was not established during the webinar.

Attribution, licensing, and versioning

- Open Oregon Educational Resources: Attribution Style Guide
- Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication: Article addressing OER versioning
- The 6Rs of Indigenous OER

Advocacy and related perspectives

- OPEN FL: Student Resources
- Fugitive Pedagogy: The Longer Roots of Antiracist Teaching
- First Do No Harm — Shared as an example of ethical questions surrounding open-source licensing.
- OPEN FL AI OER Interest Group: help@flvc.org