What are open educational resources?

Definitions of Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources (OER) are not limited to open textbooks. There are also many excellent videos, simulations, online homeworks systems, courses and even entire degree programs available - all under an open license and at no cost.

How do OER differ from commercially available materials?

- OER are available to everyone at no cost and they can be modified by the user with a few minimal restrictions, like attributing the work to the original author(s). Note that open means more than just free. Open resources are freely available and in the public domain, or openly licensed so anyone can retain, reuse, revise, remix and redistribute them.

- OER must be sought out by the adopters, whereas publishers' materials are usually marketed (aggressively at times) to faculty members by the few publishers that have an essential monopoly on the textbook market:

  Community College Proves that Schools Don't Need Textbooks

- Some OER materials rival publishers' offerings in "production values" but many are "more primitive." Here is a bit of insightful commentary on that:

  Stop Saying "High Quality" blog post by David Wiley of Lumen Learning

  Many find the simplicity of OER materials to be a desirable feature. Publishers' textbooks tend to be bloated affairs with far too much - of everything!

What is the current status of the world of OER?

If you have spent any time on Youtube looking for instruction on how to do something then you are pretty aware of what the world of OER looks like right now. (In fact, many educational videos found on Youtube are licensed as OER.) Many people are contributing, some individually, some collectively. Some do it with no financial support, some have grant funding or institutional support. One of the results of this is that the world of OER has been very distributed, which has made it difficult and time consuming to find and evaluate what is available. However, there are now signs of coalescing. To get some idea of what is out there in terms of textbooks you can select *Browse textbooks* at this link:

Open Textbook Library at the University of Minnesota Center for Open Education

There are also many excellent videos available. an example of which is the following:

Ex: Find the Intercepts of a Polynomial Function in Factored Form

The video is from James Sousa's mathispower4u website. James is a faculty member at Phoenix College in Arizona, and his videos have an open license.

Why should we use OER?

Not only are OER available at no cost or low cost (in the case that students wish to have print copies of texts provided through the bookstore), but many contend that they lead to better learning as well. I again refer you to the article

Community College Proves that Schools Don't Need Textbooks

as well as the following short video:

Open Educational Resources

What are some current incentives for faculty members to develop or adopt OER?

- Saving students money.

- Course materials that are more concise and relevant than publishers materials, leading to more effective learning.

- The ability to customize materials.

What are some current disincentives for faculty members to develop or adopt OER?

- Fear of the unfamiliar! Publishers' texts are the "safe" way to go.

- Publishers' materials are often more "seductive" than OER.

- Publishers offer generally more robust packages of support materials than are available in the OER world. In some cases a package can be purchased (by the students of course) which almost "teaches" a course by itself.

- Publishers' materials are easier to find. Usually a simple call or e-mail to a company representative will prompt the sending of numerous sample copies.

- Changing course materials often means a course redesign, which takes time from faculty.

What *could* be done to promote the development or adoption and use of OER at Oregon Tech?

- Facilitate the exploration and examination of existing OER by faculty. Other institutions throughout the state seem to be doing this by having a library faculty member devoted full- or half-time to OER.

- Reward faculty with stipends or release time for the development of OER.

- Reward faculty with stipends for the first-time adoption of OERs for a course, and perhaps for reviewing those materials when done using them.

- Encourage faculty to secure external support for development of OER. There will soon be opportunities available through the HB 2871 Open Educational Resources Grant Program to be administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Faculty could take advantage of funding through Open Oregon by partnering with community college faculty. There are likely other opportunities available as well.

- Provide staff support service for such things as instructional design, accessibility, and support from library and IT staff, to ensure that adoptions meet institutional standards.

- Promote the idea of adoption or creation of OER. For example, there could be a 1-day OER conference (keynote + workshops) on campus.

- Recognize the creation of OER, or the packaging of existing OER into course design, as professional development in support of promotion. This needs to be done with a full understanding (that many faculty members do not have) of OER.