



Instructional Technology Newsletter 20

Open Educational Resources

Carol Creager, Director of the Grafton Library

Open Educational Resources (OER): To Use or Not to Use

In the fall of 2013, Tidewater Community College piloted –and is now offering-- the first in the nation [Z-Degree](#), Z for zero textbooks. This business administration degree (all required courses including any general education classes) was designed using only open educational resources (OER), including openly licensed courseware and textbooks. The standard definition for open educational resources is the following:

“Teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license [most of these are established through [Creative Commons](#)] that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.” [Hewlett Foundation](#)

Since the launch of the Z-Degree at Tidewater, the Virginia Community College System, with support from the [Lumen Foundation](#) and the Hewlett Foundation (both big proponents of OER), are working to establish Z-Degrees --in a variety of disciplines-- at [all VCCS campuses](#). Results from the pilot showed high student engagement, lower costs for students, and greater ease for faculty in aligning flexible content to learning outcomes.

Joe Johnson echoes some of these findings. He’s been using OERs in his math classes here at Mary Baldwin for a few years. He says,

For my classes, I use both free online textbooks and an online homework system [[WeBWork](#)]. Initially I started using online textbooks to save the students money. With the number of free books out there, the free books tend to be on equal

footing with those that cost money. But, the online books are also the books that tend to be more interactive, which is great. They will have hyperlinks to exercises and tutorials and what not. Students tend to give me positive feedback about the books.

Many faculty most likely use a variety of OERs in their teaching –public domain videos, photographs, data sets, etc.— but fewer have adopted open textbooks or full courses. The 2014 and 2016 Babson Survey Research Group studies, [Opening the Curriculum: Open Education Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2014](#) and [Opening the Textbook: Open Education Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2015-16](#), show, though, that once faculty are aware of the open education options, their adoption of OERs, especially textbooks, increases. VIVA, the Virtual Library of Virginia, has joined the [Open Textbook Network](#) as a consortium with the goal of increasing training and support for faculty and librarians in the Commonwealth, especially in developing new and curating existing resources. This project would extend to all participating VIVA institutions, including Mary Baldwin; we should see training opportunities in the coming year. The State Council of Higher Education in Virginia is also supporting open initiatives through its [OpenVA](#) workshops and programming.

While there has been more widespread adoption of OERs in the past few years -- advances in technology, maturity of resources, more active curating and vetting of resources, a desire to make education more affordable and accessible to all-- there remain a few concerns. Again, from the Babson studies, primary among these concerns are copyright/intellectual property rights (can I be sure that something that has a creative commons license really contains all open or public domain material?), quality control, and ease in finding appropriate material. Additionally, while the resource may be free, there may be associated costs in hosting and maintaining it.

OERs hold promise for reducing costs for students and in offering ways to engage with students that traditional, static resources can't. With time and training, the future is promising for wider adoption. If you have a few moments, please complete our [three-question survey](#) on use of OERs at Mary Baldwin, and thanks in advance!

Additional Resources and Examples (only scratches the surface):

OER Commons –<http://www.oercommons.org>

Creative Commons -- <http://creativecommons.org/>

Digital Commons Network -- <http://network.bepress.com/>

MIT OpenCourseWare -- <http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>

OpenStax (formerly Connexions) -- <http://cnx.org> Rice University, started in 1999

Teaching Commons -- <http://teachingcommons.us/>

edX -- <https://www.edx.org/>

About the Committee:

The Instructional Technology Committee at Mary Baldwin College is a faculty committee made up of representatives from the faculty and Instructional Technology staff at MBC. Members of the Current Committee are:

Pam Bailey

Paul Callo

Carol Creager

Doris Dodson

George Guba

Joe Johnson

Carolyn Moore

Reid Oechslin

Beverly Riddell

Kari Salois

The charter of the committee is to:

- *Provide a forum for input to the Instructional Technology staff on the relative value of technological improvements from a pedagogical perspective.*
- *Be a champion and example for technology enhanced teaching within their schools*
- *Try out new technologies that seem promising*
- *Develop and share best practices & rubrics for technology enhanced teaching*
- *Recommend equipment and management for mixed use (instructional and non-instructional) space*
- *This committee meets as necessary.*

