All Hands on Deck: How One University Pooled Resources to Educate and Advocate for Affordable Course Content

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Introduction

A strong case can be made for academic library involvement in Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Affordable Course Content (ACC). Academic libraries typically employ librarians who are experts in topics aligned with OERs and ACC, including copyright, fair use, and Creative Commons (CC) licensing, as well as in finding resources to support and to map out academic curricula. Libraries are also in the unique position of having distinct and defined connections with members of all three stakeholder groups: students, faculty, and administrators.

At Old Dominion University (ODU), the Libraries thus became the initial conversation starter and coordinator of educational and advocacy activities involving these stakeholders. Because ODU Libraries do not have the resources or staffing to provide substantial faculty incentives or serve as the sole provider of large-scale educational initiatives on OERs/ACC, we realized early on that we would need partnerships. These would be crucial in educating faculty about the growing problem of the cost of course materials and about the financial and academic impact of traditional textbook use on our students, and in advocating for the use of OERs/ACC to positively impact student learning. It is of strategic benefit to take advantage of what other stakeholders can offer, and to explore future partnerships.

As a member of VIVA (the Virtual Library of Virginia), our statewide library consortium for non-profit academic universities, the ODU Libraries are part of the Open Textbook Network (OTN), an organization which promotes the use of OERs, and counts more than 600 universities as members. An ODU librarian serves as the OTN campus leader, participating in yearly training sessions provided by VIVA and facilitating faculty workshops on OERs. The Libraries are responsible for all scholarly communications related to open access on campus. At our institution, OERs reside under the umbrella of scholarly communications and hold a place in our Libraries’ strategic plan for scholarly communications.

During the summer of 2016, the Libraries began the process of identifying and bringing together stakeholders to promote OERs/ACC on campus. Having recognized that many entities were working on OERs but not sharing information with one another, our goal was to determine how resources could be shared and duplication of effort could be avoided to help as many students as possible.
This chapter details our efforts, beginning with a kick-off event—a faculty forum—to introduce OERs/ACC to faculty and administrators with the goal of igniting a university-wide effort on reducing student expenses.

We began with our student leaders, including representatives from the Student Government Association (SGA) and the Graduate Student Organization. From our Center for High Impact Practices (CHIP), which focuses on student success, we invited a representative who was already doing work and advocacy on OERs. We also invited the director of our Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT), which assists faculty with course design and the integration of technology into their teaching, and a representative from Academic Affairs, who was a former Dean and served as special assistant to the Provost. Each stakeholder had a key role to play, and we established these roles early in our communications. We will discuss these roles in more detail throughout this chapter.

Since the initial stakeholder meetings, the ODU Libraries, SGA, CHIP, and CLT have worked both separately and together to educate faculty and students, to promote ACC use, and to gather and share information about the ways in which students and faculty view and use both traditional resources and OERs.

This chapter details our efforts, beginning with a kick-off event—a faculty forum—to introduce OERs/ACC to faculty and administrators with the goal of igniting a university-wide effort on reducing student expenses. We describe ODU’s membership in the OTN, which resulted in an OER workshop during Open Access Week, and detail our efforts to understand, educate, and assist our stakeholders. We also discuss the Libraries’ role in helping faculty obtain external and/or university-funded grants, like those from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Affordable Pathways Partnership and the CLT faculty grant program. In addition, we talk about our collaboration with student leaders in hosting a Student Advocacy event, describe our efforts to gain insight into the impact of textbook costs on student success, and explore how ODU students engage with course materials. We conclude by discussing our plans and the challenges ahead.

Building an OER/ACC Program: Education & Incentives

ODU’s biggest challenges in building a robust OER/ACC program are educating faculty from a wide range of disciplines about these resources and providing faculty incentives. Tenure-track and tenured faculty focus their time on research and what is needed for promotion. Non-tenure track faculty are often pressed for time because they have larger teaching loads. If no credit or recognition is given for implementing existing OERs/ACC into courses, or for creating new ones, faculty need other incentives to put in the time needed for this work. This section describes our efforts to educate and advocate on this issue and to incentivize the use of OERs/ACC.

Kick-Off Event: Faculty Forum on OERs and ACC

As a primary result of our initial meetings, the stakeholders collaborated on a faculty forum addressing OERs and ACC. Faculty forums, sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs, are regular events on the ODU campus, and are typically used to discuss timely topics in higher education or topics relevant to happenings at the University.
Since these events are part of the routine for many faculty, we determined that a forum would be an excellent opportunity to begin a campus-wide conversation about OERs/ACC—to show how their use could reduce student expenses and enhance both teaching and learning, to provide data on the burden of course material costs, and to discuss how OERs/ACC can impact student success.

The forum was promoted to faculty through the Faculty Senate. All interested faculty and staff were invited, including those already using OERs or ACC and those who were simply curious. To provide a common language and framework for discussions, the forum focused on the following:

- Definitions of OERs and ACC
- Key reasons to consider using OERs/ACC in the classroom
- The potential impact on teaching practices when using OERs/ACC, including the ability to reuse and modify open content to promote collaborative and participatory student learning activities
- Opportunities to use OERs/ACC, which can be modified and assembled from the best resources for particular learning outcomes, to provide more diverse learning environments
- Upcoming on-campus opportunities and incentives to learn about and implement OERs/ACC in existing courses

The forum included a panel discussion with ODU faculty who were early adopters of OERs/ACC. The panel was facilitated by the University Librarian, and included three faculty members representing the College of Education and the College of Arts and Letters, as well as a member of the Graduate Student Organization who was also a graduate teaching assistant. The faculty members provided two very different examples of how OERs/ACC could be implemented in curricula, as well as insight into lessons learned. The graduate teaching assistant was in the unique position of being able to provide both student and faculty perspectives on how cost and quality of materials can impact academic success; this personal narrative allowed faculty to hear from a peer-teacher about his very recent experiences as a student.

After a question-and-answer session, the forum ended with a call to action, focused on motivating attendees to continue the discussion, participate in upcoming opportunities to learn more about OERs/ACC, apply for funding opportunities, and implement OERs/ACC in their courses.

To evaluate whether the Faculty Forum helped us achieve our goals of educating faculty about OER/ACC options, we distributed a questionnaire to the 31 attendees. While all respondents (n=10) reported low to no knowledge of OERs/ACC before coming to the forum, four participants indicated that they had a high interest in using affordable course content after the presentation and two expressed a moderate interest. When asked about the obstacles hindering them from using OERs/ACC, the two most common themes were a lack of knowledge about how to find resources or implement the content into course curricula, and a lack of time needed to develop the materials. Four respondents provided their contact information to receive information about future OER/ACC opportunities.

The forum also provided an opportunity to promote an upcoming OTN workshop provided by the Libraries and make a call for applications for faculty OER/ACC mini-grants provided by CLT. These programs are detailed below.
Joining the Open Textbook Network (OTN)

ODU’s membership in the OTN, which began in the fall of 2016, led to an important effort to promote and support OERs/ACC. Early in the semester, the campus OTN leader, a librarian, attended an initial training session facilitated by the Executive and Managing Directors of the OTN. The session was a train-the-trainer workshop, in which campus leaders learned how to facilitate workshops to advocate for OERs at their home institutions, and to teach their own faculty how to participate as reviewers of textbooks included in the OTN. These faculty reviews not only help determine the quality of OTN’s open course materials, but encourage faculty to engage with these materials—and thus become more likely to adopt them for course use. VIVA provides a $200 stipend for faculty who participate in institutional OTN workshops and review a textbook for the OTN. The ODU Libraries offered two OTN workshops during the 2016–2017 academic year, one during each academic semester.

The first workshop was held during Open Access Week, soon after the kick-off forum. We wanted to build off the momentum we had established, and capitalize on advertising we were already doing for a series of Open Access Week events. In addition to general advertising, we sent targeted emails to faculty who attended the previous faculty forum and expressed an interest in learning more about OERs/ACC. Faculty attendance at workshops provided by the Libraries is usually low, so targeted emails and the $200 incentive provided by VIVA helped boost attendance.

There were 22 attendees at the first OTN workshop. Seven were librarians whose reasons for attending included the opportunity to network with faculty and the desire to learn more about OERs/ACC.

The workshop’s ultimate goal was for faculty to engage with OTN materials by completing expert reviews. Of the 15 faculty members who attended, three completed book reviews for stipends and four indicated that they planned to adopt an open textbook in the future. Anecdotally, facilitators of the campus OTN leader workshop shared that about one-fourth of faculty workshop attendees complete reviews, so participation from ODU faculty was slightly less than average.

We held a second OTN workshop in the spring of 2017. To recruit participants we contacted faculty who attended the forum in the fall of 2016, recipients of the CLT Mini-Grants (described later in this chapter), and those teaching high-enrollment courses for which open textbooks were available. Eleven faculty attended and five completed book reviews for stipends, so while attendance was lower the completion rate was higher. While merely speculative, we think this could be attributed to the targeting of faculty who teach the high-enrollment courses or to advocacy efforts in the preceding months, or, perhaps, since this was the second time the campus OTN leader presented this workshop, the presentation itself may have been more effective in motivating faculty to complete reviews of OTN materials.

The timing of the first OTN workshop on campus was important, as it aligned with the call for proposals for the CLT Mini-Grant, which were due the following week and which focused on implementing existing OERs into courses. Faculty attendees were interested both in participating in the OTN materials review program and in learning about OERs in general. A handful of faculty members who attended did receive a mini-grant, and used the book they reviewed for OTN in their classes. While the mini-grants and the first OTN workshop were two separate initiatives, the workshop assisted in supporting and preparing faculty as they wrote their proposals and implemented their projects, and the mini-grants assisted in bringing faculty to the workshop.
The CLT Annual Summer Institute on OERs

As part of these institutional efforts to educate the university community about OERs/ACC, CLT dedicated its Annual Summer Institute to OERs. Featuring a national OER leader, David Wiley, as keynote speaker, the event explored ways in which the use of open educational resources can advance teaching, learning, and research on campus. Subtopics attempted to engage the campus community to discuss, reflect upon, and answer some of the following questions:

1. What are some of the challenges associated with adopting, implementing, and using OERs (workload, quality, technology)?
2. How do we engage administrators to foster OER adoption and stimulate faculty interest in OERs (institutional guidance, policies and procedures, support framework)?
3. How can we engage faculty to embrace OERs as a strategy to improve their students’ learning outcomes?
4. How can we use OERs to provide innovative opportunities for teaching and learning (knowledge creation, peer-learning, social interaction, shared learning practices)?
5. How can we jumpstart a research agenda around OER adoption, use, and evaluation?
6. How can we make OERs a core element of our teaching culture, to foster sharing, reuse, collaborative development, and innovation?
7. How do we create student-led OER initiatives, involving students in OER development and production?

With these questions as background, the two-day event included 21 panels, workshops, and individual sessions facilitated by 53 participants. The panels provided a platform for sharing ideas and suggestions on how to promote our institutional OER agenda, while the workshops and sessions offered hands-on activities on how to find, design and assess OER content. More than 210 attendees, including faculty, administrators, and staff, took part.

The Libraries had a strong presence at the Institute, with three librarians presenting and one presenting multiple times. One librarian facilitated a plenary discussion panel of students on the topic of OERs. As it occurred during a meal, was the only event offered during that time slot, and was the only session involving undergraduate students, it was widely attended, and established the Libraries as a strong partner in the ODU’s growing OER/ACC movement to attendees who were new to the topic. In concurrent sessions, two librarians presented preliminary results of a student survey on the cost of textbooks, and a librarian facilitated a workshop for graduate students in the University’s “Preparing Future Faculty” program on implementing OERs/ACC into their teaching. The Libraries also displayed physical copies of OpenSTAX textbooks purchased by the SGA for the University Libraries reserves.

Attendees’ feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 91% of respondents expressing
Attendees’ feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with more than 91% of respondents (N=256, users responded to more than one survey based on the number of sessions attended) expressing their strong satisfaction with the institute sessions. Similarly, 94% strongly agreed or agreed that the sessions contributed to their understanding of OERs, while 82% expressed interest in including OERs in future classes. Open-ended responses echoed these results; respondents indicated that the institute contributed to their understanding of OERs—the definition, requirements, strategies for adoption, and roadblocks faced by faculty and students. To this last point, several attendees appreciated the opportunity given to students to express their perspective on OERs. The student panel was well-received and attended.

In sum, this event was quite successful and accomplished our goal of providing a platform to institutional and faculty leaders to explore the potential of OERs, and ways in which these resources can enrich their teaching and learning practices while also enabling students to access affordable and appropriate content.

**Faculty Incentives**

**SCHEV Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant**

In addition to the introductory program offerings described above, ODU has also participated in two incentive programs meant to provide more affordable content options to two different student populations. First, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) Affordable Pathways Partnership Grant allowed ODU to partner with an area high school and community college. With a $140,000 grant from this program, ODU, Kempsville High School (Virginia Beach City Public Schools), and Tidewater Community College (TCC) have developed a program to offer students in the high school’s Entrepreneurship and Business Academy dual-enrollment in TCC’s business and entrepreneurship program, earning college credit while attending high school, and doing so without incurring fees for tuition or textbooks. Students then have an opportunity to matriculate into ODU’s Interdisciplinary Studies in Leadership major.

Kempsville High School’s Entrepreneurship and Business Academy welcomed its first class of students in September, 2016, and 230 have enrolled to date. In the fall of 2017, 80 academy students took a test that set them up for dual-enrollment courses at Tidewater Community College for the 2017–18 school year. The partnership team will continue to track dual-enrollment activity to determine tuition cost savings.

The Affordable Pathways Grant uses OERs/ACC rather than traditional textbooks to eliminate textbook costs for ODU upper-class students. ODU faculty were invited to apply to develop OER/ACC courses for the Affordable Pathways program. Sixteen ODU faculty were selected, and subsequently developed 300–400 level courses in a variety of areas including Information Technology, Technical Writing, Engineering Management, Supply Chain Management, Business Ethics, and Women in Leadership.
As a feature of the Affordable Pathways Grant, ODU successfully launched its Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies Leadership program, providing students an option for a textbook-free major. While this program is not directly tied to Kempsville High School’s Entrepreneurship and Business Academy, we anticipate that students from Kempsville High School and TCC will transfer to ODU through the two programs and the pathway coordinated by all three institutions, completing a full degree with no textbook costs incurred. The BS in Interdisciplinary Studies Leadership is also available to students who do not transfer from the Kempsville High School and TCC program. ODU students have already begun to enroll in this textbook-free degree program, and it is the fastest growing major at our institution. To date, 443 ODU students have enrolled in these upper-level courses, with zero cost for course materials.

The Libraries supported the SCHEV grant. Faculty designing OER courses for the Interdisciplinary Leadership program were required to complete an OER course offered by TCC. Called Pathways, the course teaches faculty about OERs, copyright and Creative Commons licensing, and ways to find, select and create OERs for courses. An ODU librarian completed the Pathways course, participated with faculty in the class discussion board and in regular online meetings, and advised faculty on finding and selecting existing OERs/ACC as they designed their courses for the program. Having the librarian embedded throughout the entire process was beneficial to both parties. Faculty were able to seek assistance locating existing OERs/ACC for their courses, and all participants could see the advice and resources presented by the librarian within their online discussions. Participation in the Pathways course and the online meetings made the librarian familiar with the parameters of the project and the information provided to the faculty, enabling her to easily provide help.

Open Educational Resources Mini-Grant program

A second faculty grant program, offered by the CLT in the fall/spring of 2016, was aimed at drawing faculty participants and advocates into the OER/ACC movement across campus. The Open Educational Resources Mini-Grant program encouraged ODU faculty and adjuncts to explore the use of OERs and open textbooks (those that have been funded, published, and licensed to be freely used, adapted, and distributed) as an alternative to traditional textbooks, particularly in required courses with high enrollment or high textbook costs.

Faculty were invited to (1) redesign their courses around existing OERs or open textbooks as an alternative to commercial textbooks, and (2) revise/remix existing OERs to create new open content (modules, question banks, multimedia content, simulations, lecture slides, etc.). The goals of the mini-grant program were as follows:

1. Engage faculty to rethink and redesign their courses by replacing proprietary textbooks with OERs
2. Encourage faculty adoption and incorporation of OERs into their course design
3. Help lower the cost of required materials (textbooks, etc.) for students
4. Enrich learning materials by developing current resources that are engaging and interactive
5. Improve students’ learning outcomes and course satisfaction
6. Promote a campus-wide dialogue about OER creation and development
7. Build institutional capacity to develop OERs and, potentially, to offer complete degree programs using OERs

8. Contribute to the growing body of OERs available to the global higher education community

Fourteen proposals were received, representing faculty from a broad range of colleges and departments. Mini-grants were awarded to the seven that best met the criteria iterated above, which included proposals for incorporating OERs into a graduate course in education research methods, developing OERs for a semester of English Composition, incorporating existing OERs into courses in Genetics and Biochemistry and into an Art Appreciation course, and using Free Mathematica Resources for Precalculus I Technology.

Librarians were integral to the mini-grant process. First, a librarian assisted faculty with writing their grant proposals. As mentioned previously, several faculty who attended the first OTN workshop were motivated to attend because it was offered within a week of the proposal due date. They attended for the sole purpose of gaining the knowledge needed to write their proposals, and came with specific questions related to their proposal ideas. A librarian also served as a reviewer of the grant proposals, and provided a broad understanding of how projects might be impacted by the existence or lack of OER resources.

Contributions to the faculty incentive programs made by each stakeholder prove that partnerships between the Libraries and other organizations on campus are integral in advocating and educating for the use of OERs/ACC in teaching, and have helped establish the specific roles each partner plays in this movement.

Students, Perceptions, and Advocacy

Throughout the initial stages of the OER/ACC initiatives at ODU, we shared with faculty national statistics about the rising cost of textbooks, and longitudinal studies about the impact of OERs on student success and on student purchase and use of textbooks. ODU students, however, have their own unique stories to share, and stakeholders on campus recognized that these stories along with local statistics would resonate more powerfully with ODU faculty and students.

Our Student Body

The University is located less than five miles from Naval Station Norfolk, the world’s largest naval base, and many of its students are active duty military, veterans, or military spouses. The majority of transfer students at ODU come from Tidewater Community College (TCC), which has a national reputation for its work developing courses that do not require a textbook purchase, and is part of Virginia Community College System (VCCS), which has a robust OER program. The average student age is 24 among undergraduates, and 34 among graduate students, illustrating that we have a larger than average population of “non-traditional” students.

Hosting a Student Advocacy Event

The contributions of student leaders from our SGA and GSO were crucial to the success of OER/ACC advocacy
events involving students. A key contributor to success when involving students is to let students themselves lead. In the early stages of the Libraries’ involvement with OER, an officer from our SGA contacted our University Librarian because he had learned about Maryland’s open textbook program, which was primarily driven by their SGA. This student, along with a leader in the GSO, participated in all of our education and advocacy events targeted at faculty, took leadership roles in student advocacy events, and helped gather qualitative and quantitative data on student perceptions of textbook costs and general engagement with course materials.

We invited our student leaders to help plan events for Open Education Week 2017, and they did so with great enthusiasm. They were present at our kick-off event in the student center, which motivated uninvolved students to participate and join in the discussion. They were instrumental in bringing student participation to our events. And they suggested placing a “talkback wall”—a bulletin board or whiteboard on which students can post their thoughts on a topic—in our student center and main library. The ODU SGA regularly uses these walls to obtain feedback on timely topics, so students are used to this form of engagement. By the end of Open Education Week 2017, we had over 250 responses to the question: “How do you feel about the cost of textbooks and what do you do about it?” This provided us with a good amount of qualitative data, which we analyzed and provided to faculty in later presentations and reports. Two of the primary themes arising from these data are that our students think that textbooks cost too much and that the cost of course materials presents barriers to their academic success.

Having the perspective of our graduate student leader was also important. Since graduate teaching assistants teach many high-enrollment general education courses, for which high-quality open textbooks are available, their choices and advocacy can impact many students. Our representative from the GSO was able to speak to both students and faculty in their own languages. Along with contributing to the faculty forum, he partnered with a librarian in leading a workshop for ODU’s Preparing Future Faculty Program on selecting appropriate OERs/ACC for courses. This workshop, which allowed us to introduce the topic to our graduate students early in their academic careers, was included in the CLT Summer Institute as part of our larger collaboration and education efforts related to OERs/ACC.

Surveying Our Students

While student leaders and on-campus students represent an important portion of our student body, we also have a lot to learn from our general student population. In the spring of 2017 we distributed a survey via email to a sample group of undergraduate students, identified by the Office of Institutional Assessment. The survey aimed to examine the use of traditional textbooks at ODU, to investigate whether textbook cost plays a role in student success, and to explore how ODU students engage with course materials. We also asked the 486 participants whether they had transferred to ODU from Tidewater Community College (TCC), which has a robust zero-textbook course program. We then asked the former TCC students if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up study. This study, with 30 participants, took place in the fall of 2017, and aimed to examine the
perceptions of students who had experienced both OER courses and traditional textbook courses, and to compare those two experiences as they related to academic success and course engagement.

The two surveys, as well as the qualitative data gathered throughout spring, 2017, have provided us with robust data to share with administration and faculty and to use when advocating for OER/ACC use. We shared preliminary results of the undergraduate survey at the CLT Summer Institute and at a panel discussion between faculty and students on OERs/ACC in the fall of 2017. Participating in the Summer Institute strengthened the Libraries’ partnership with CLT, and both events helped us advocate to faculty and administrators on behalf of our students. Our presentations at these structured events provided faculty and administrators with both anecdotal evidence and reliable local data to consider as they develop courses and policies.

For the student panel and roundtable discussions on OERs/ACC in the fall of 2017, we invited those who had completed the TCC transfer student survey to serve as panelists, and the audience was comprised of representatives from several ODU populations including students, librarians, faculty, and administrators. When inviting students to participate in events that also involve faculty and administrators, we learned that flexibility is important. Only one of the planned student panelists attended, but we were able to involve other students who had not transferred from TCC but who had experienced both traditional textbook and non-textbook courses.

One notable point in the panel discussion was the students’ focus on the quality of teaching rather than the format of the course materials; in their experience, the courses that used OERs were better taught than those using traditional textbooks. However, when asked if they had to choose between a great instructor who used a traditional textbook and an instructor they knew nothing about who used an OER or ACC, the student panelists stated that they would choose the great instructor regardless of the course materials. For these students, good teaching was more important than the money they may or may not have to spend on course materials.

Both the Summer Institute and the panel discussion proved that the Libraries can play an important role in providing structured opportunities for students to contribute to discussions and share their perspectives, and that faculty and administrators are very interested in understanding student perspectives.

Challenges, Future Plans, and Conclusions

The OER/ACC movement at Old Dominion University is just beginning. While we have solidified key stakeholder roles, there are other stakeholders we would like to involve in the future, including the campus bookstore and other student organizations. We also see the potential for collaborations across our state with other public academic institutions, as well as with VIVA, our state library consortium.

Most importantly, we have discovered that the most important stakeholders are our students, and that local data and student stories can be influential in gaining faculty buy-in when it comes to selecting OERs/ACC for their
courses. Providing students with structured opportunities to share their stories, as we did at the CLT Summer Institute, Open Education Week, and our Open Access Week events, can give them a voice and a venue in which they will be heard.

During the first years of our journey, we have discovered additional questions and topics for investigation. Data gathered through the student surveys, for instance, have led us to focus on how students engage with course materials, and we’re using this information to advocate for more use of open pedagogy among our faculty, rather than focusing solely on reducing textbook cost. We have also found that faculty incentives are a factor in motivating faculty to change from traditional course materials to OER/sACC. Since we struggle with faculty incentives during a time of economic hardship, but would still like to reward faculty for creating OER/sACC or implementing open pedagogy in other ways, advocating for recognition during the promotion process is an alternative to consider.

Another challenge is to maintain momentum. Our OER/ACC efforts to date have involved loose collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders at ODU. Collaborating and pooling resources is key to success, but having no real center for OERs/ACC initiatives means that no single entity is able to devote a significant amount of time and resources to this effort, which could cause lags in our progress. Communication and creativity will be key to future successes, and the Libraries will continue to have the essential role of connecting the dots between campus stakeholder groups.

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