Summer Academe

Conference Papers

Fall 2015

Free! Open Educational Resources Are Good Business for Summer Sessions

William G. Chismar
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Abstract

Students at institutions of higher education are spending millions of dollars per semester on textbooks. This financial burden is having a negative impact on student success. By promoting the use of free course materials, the open educational resources (OER) movement provides a way to greatly reduce textbook costs, while also offering an opportunity for academic innovation. Since the OER movement is still in its early stages, with modest investment summer sessions have an opportunity to take leadership roles on their campuses by beginning OER initiatives. In addition to helping students reduce educational costs and thereby improve their success, OER initiatives can be effective marketing tools by providing very positive press. Furthermore, the OER initiatives can increase summer sessions' reputation as a leader in academic innovation on campus. In this paper, we explain OER, its potential benefits for summer sessions, and a strategy for implementing OER.

The high cost of textbooks and the growing open access movement provide an excellent opportunity for institutions to promote their summer sessions by eliminating textbook costs. While recent discussions of the alarming rise in the cost of a college education have focused primarily on the cost of tuition, the cost of textbooks has been rising at a similar rate. From 2002 to 2012, during which overall consumer prices rose 28%, tuition and textbook costs rose 89% and 82%, respectively (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2013). The College Board[1] estimates an undergraduate at a four-year American public institution will spend an average of $1,225 per year on textbooks and supplies, which averages about 13.4% of the cost of tuition (College Board, 2014).

The financial burden placed on students by the high cost of textbooks is adversely affecting their academic success. In a recent survey of 2,039 students across 150 American university campuses, 65% of the students reported having not bought a textbook because it was too expensive (Senack, 2014), despite the fact that 94% of these students were concerned that this would hurt their course grade. In addition, nearly half of the students reported that the high cost of textbooks impacted how many and which courses they took each semester. Students will not succeed in courses without having required course materials and will be delayed in making progress toward their degrees.
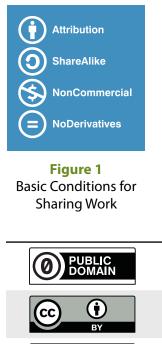
Open educational resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research materials, including textbooks, in any medium that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits their free use and repurposing by others. The primary goal of OER is to make course materials available to students at no cost, so all students will have all required materials on the first day of class. A secondary goal of OER is to provide instructors with a larger set of options for course materials and how those materials are used in restructuring curriculum.

OER and Copyright

Traditionally, educational materials were either copyrighted with all rights reserved or they were in the public domain with no rights reserved. Where all rights are reserved, the copyright holder maintains control over the distribution and use of the material and realizes any financial value derived from the material. Copyright law is used to prevent unauthorized use and modification of the material. If copyrighted materials are used in a class, someone, usually the students, must pay for use of the materials and the instructor must use them without modification. In the case of a textbook, the students buy or rent the book, and the instructor cannot modify its contents.
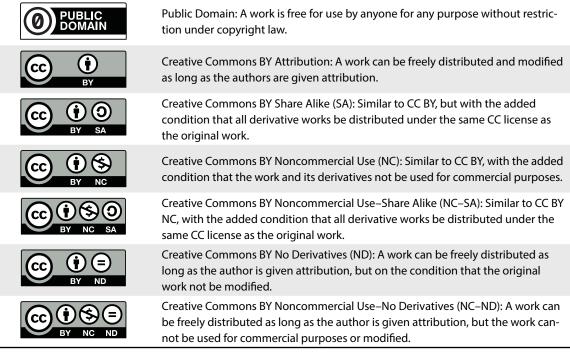
If materials are in the public domain, students can freely copy and use the material, and instructors can freely modify or repurpose the content. The authors of the material in the public domain have no control over the materials, receive no financial returns, and do not need to be acknowledged as the creators. Thus, there is little incentive for authors to put their works in the public domain, and they rarely do. We now have a situation where copyrighted course materials have become expensive and limit academic innovation, and very little useful educational material is in the public domain. Fortunately, there are licensing options between the two extremes of no rights reserved and all rights reserved.

---

1   The College Board is an American nonprofit organization, created to expand access to higher education.

Figure 1
Basic Conditions for
Sharing Work

Copyright law allows for the holders of the copyright to reserve some, but not all, rights and to specify which rights they wish to reserve. The nonprofit organization Creative Commons (CC)[2] provides copyright licenses that enable the public to use and distribute creative works, such as books, software, music, photos, or other works of art, under conditions specified by the creators of the works. CC licenses also allow the creators to change their copyright terms from the default "all rights reserved" to "some rights reserved."

Four basic conditions for sharing—attribution, share alike, noncommericial use, and no derivatives (see Figure 1)—are combined to create six standard CC licenses (see Figure 2).

	Public Domain: A work is free for use by anyone for any purpose without restriction under copyright law.
	Creative Commons BY Attribution: A work can be freely distributed and modified as long as the authors are given attribution.
	Creative Commons BY Share Alike (SA): Similar to CC BY, but with the added condition that all derivative works be distributed under the same CC license as the original work.
	Creative Commons BY Noncommercial Use (NC): Similar to CC BY, with the added condition that the work and its derivatives not be used for commercial purposes.
	Creative Commons BY Noncommercial Use–Share Alike (NC–SA): Similar to CC BY NC, with the added condition that all derivative works be distributed under the same CC license as the original work.
	Creative Commons BY No Derivatives (ND): A work can be freely distributed as long as the author is given attribution, but on the condition that the original work not be modified.
	Creative Commons BY Noncommercial Use–No Derivatives (NC–ND): A work can be freely distributed as long as the author is given attribution, but the work cannot be used for commercial purposes or modified.

Figure 2
Six Creative Commons Licenses and Descriptions

In 2014, over 880 million creative works had been released with CC licenses, including music, videos, photographs, software, textbooks, presentations, and websites. The CC licenses provide internationally recognized legal rights to the creators of the works and an easy way to put these rights in machine-readable form that can be recognized by Internet search engines.

---

2   For more information on Creative Commons see http://creativecommons.org

Benefits of OER for Summer Sessions

The obvious, significant benefit of OER is the reduced cost of education for students. In addition, because the use of OER allows for all students to have all course materials on day one, student success increases, and they are no longer making course selections based on the cost of course materials. But the benefits of OER extend beyond the students to the instructors. Because OER allows faculty to revise, remix, and repurpose course material, it provides opportunities for curriculum innovation. For example, courses can be redesigned to include direct student involvement in revising existing course materials and creating new ones.

The major benefits of OER for summer sessions are in marketing and building the reputation of summer sessions for academic innovation and leadership. Because the average cost of textbooks during the academic year is so high, a great marketing tool is the offer of summer courses with zero cost for textbooks. Imagine the promotional opportunities of listing summer courses as "Now with no textbook costs!"

OER can help build the campus-wide reputation of summer sessions in three ways. First, and most obviously, by reducing the cost of courses to students and concomitantly contributing to improved student success, the summer sessions increases its reputation for caring for students. Positive responses from students who are spending less money on courses will reinforce this reputation.

Second, by providing faculty with a means of improving curriculum through better course materials and greater student engagement, an OER initiative will build summer sessions' reputation as a vehicle for academic innovation.

Third, OER is receiving a lot of positive press and is expected to have significant adoption across universities over the next few years. By initiating OER on a campus, summer sessions programs gain a highly visible reputation for academic leadership.

An OER initiative begun in summer sessions will likely impact the fall, winter, and spring terms for two reasons. First, students who take courses in the summer with zero textbook costs will begin asking why this is not an option in other classes. Second, faculty who adopt OER for summer courses will likely want to continue using OER in other courses. Because of the sheer number of courses, OER has the potential for a much greater impact beyond summer sessions. However, once OER is successful beyond the summer sessions, the university administration may move control of the OER initiative out of summer sessions. Losing ownership of the OER initiative is not detrimental to summer sessions, and control should rest where there is the greatest impact. As the pioneer on campus of the OER initiative, summer sessions will be credited and remembered for its academic leadership.

Implementation of OER

The amount of money students spend on textbooks each semester, including summer, is surprisingly large and, when publicly discussed, generates much attention. So, before embarking on an OER initiative, a summer sessions program should estimate how much money students at its institution spend on textbooks each semester. To avoid having to calculate the cost for every course, take a sample of the 50 largest enrolled courses. Find out what the required textbooks cost, multiply those figures by enrollment numbers, and you will have the cost for the 50 courses. You can then scale this number up for the total number of courses offered each semester. This will provide an estimate of what students would spend each semester if they were to buy all of the required textbooks. For a medium sized four-year institution, this number can reach the tens of millions of dollars for the fall or spring semesters, and millions for summer sessions. Once it is considered that much of this money comes from student financial aid and that the overwhelming bulk of this money goes to for-profit publishing companies, people quickly begin supporting the idea of OER.

It is important to obtain the support of senior leadership on campus for an OER initiative. As a highly visible project and something senior leadership will promote, it provides further credibility to summer sessions as a leader in academic initiative and improves the success of the initiative. Figure 3 shows the basic steps in developing an OER initiative.
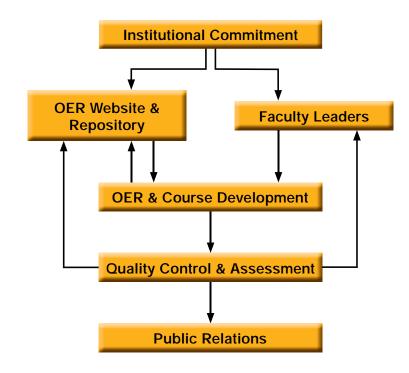

Figure 3
Open Educational Resources (OER) Implementation Strategy

Building a Foundation for OER

Before OER courses can be developed, two fundamental steps need to be taken: an OER infrastructure must be developed and a core group of faculty leaders must be formed. The infrastructure should include an OER website and repository. The website provides information to faculty, staff, and students about OER, your campus initiative, and initiatives at other institutions. The OER repository provides a single site for open resources used and created by your faculty. And, in the spirit of open sharing, the repository makes these resources available for free to faculty and students at other institutions. Many institutions currently have open repositories for research papers written by their faculty; the OER repository parallels that for instructional material. To facilitate ease in setting up courses, there should be a simple way for faculty to move or link material in the OER repository to course-management software.

Because faculty have full authority over materials used in classes, building a group of faculty leaders is essential to a successful OER initiative. You will likely find a good number of instructors already quite concerned about the financial burden textbooks place on students and very interested in participating in an OER initiative. The major faculty concerns will be the quality of OER materials, the time it takes to find existing materials, and the time it takes to modify existing materials or create new ones. Talks, workshops, and one-on-one meetings with faculty will help address these concerns. Many institutions have found that librarians, particularly those involved with open access, are useful in helping faculty get started.

Developing OER Course Materials

Once a group of participating faculty and the OER infrastructure are in place, the task of developing OER courses and materials can begin. Three approaches to developing OER course materials can be used:

1. *Adopt* existing OER textbooks and materials, essentially replacing existing textbooks and materials. The effort involved is similar in scope to adopting a new textbook for a course.

2. *Adapt* existing OER textbooks and materials by customizing existing materials for a course. The effort involved is similar to creating online course material.

3. *Create* new OER materials. The effort involved is similar in scope to writing a new textbook with many collaborators.

Support to faculty will be needed in each of these approaches. As noted above, librarians are good resources, particularly when helping faculty find existing OER textbooks. Assigning an OER librarian is highly recommended. In adapting existing OER materials, faculty would also benefit from the support of instructional designers. Creating new OER materials represents a more significant undertaking, requiring direct financial support or release time to faculty and professional services for assistance in content development and editing. This last development approach, while potentially beneficial, is likely outside the resources of many summer sessions. After OER materials and courses are developed, they must be monitored for quality assurance and assessed for their financial and educational impacts.

Once the OER program is launched and feedback acquired, use the data and comments from students and faculty to widely publicize the positive benefits of OER. Not only will this produce more interest in OER among faculty and students, it will also increase the visibility and reputation of the summer sessions.

Conclusion

At almost every educational institution, students are spending millions of dollars per term on textbooks. OER provides a way to greatly reduce textbook costs, while creating opportunities for academic innovation. Although the OER movement is still in its early stages, summer sessions can take leadership roles on their campuses. With modest investment and coordination with units and faculty across campus, summer sessions can begin OER initiatives. To date, there has been widespread support and little resistance to making this low-risk investment for summer sessions. However, faculty members who publish textbooks and representatives from publishing companies may raise objections to OER, but as long as OER is not mandatory, and focuses on helping students, these objections are easily countered. Summer sessions should investigate OER; it helps students, promotes summer courses, generates positive press, and increases summer sessions' reputation as a leader in academic innovation.

References

College Board. (2014). *Trends in college pricing 2014:* Retrieved from http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/2014-trends-college-pricing-final-web.pdf

Senack, Ethan. (2014). *Fixing the broken textbook market: How students respond to high textbook costs and demand alternatives.* U.S. PIRG Education Fund and The Student PIRGS. Retrieved from http://www.studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/NATIONAL%20Fixing%20Broken%20Textbooks%20Report1.pdf

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *College textbooks: Students have greater access to textbook information* (GAO-13-368). Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655066.pdf

Biography

William Chismar is the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's dean of Outreach College, which includes summer sessions, continuing education, and international programs. He is also a professor of information technology management in the Shidler College of Business. He has led the OER initiatives at the University of Hawai'i since 2014.