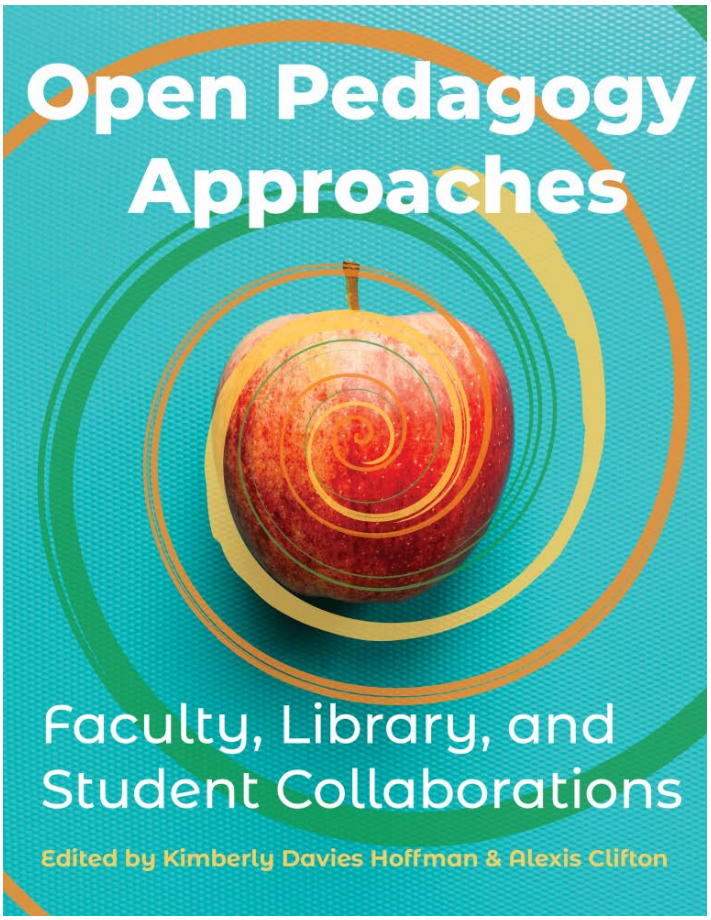
OPEN PEDAGOGY APPROACHES:

Faculty, Library, and Student Collaborations



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OPEN PEDAGOGY BIG AND SMALL: COMPARING OPEN PEDAGOGY EFFORTS IN LARGE AND SMALL HIGHER EDUCATION SETTINGS

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Project Overview

Project Discipline: Open Pedagogy Programs

Project Outcome: Research Study and Program Analysis

Tools Used: Otter.ai

Resources Included in Chapter:

- Interview Protocol

Introduction

As Rajiv Jhangiani noted recently, open education is now in its "adolescent" years (Jhangiani, 2017b). In 2016, both the Creative Commons organization and MIT's OpenCourseWare initiative celebrated their 15-year anniversaries, and these two foundational events are as good a way as any to mark the beginnings of the modern open-education movement. While awareness of open educational resources (OER) continues to be important, and education and advocacy continue to be necessary, it is time to advance our thinking about what the next steps for the open education movement should be.

To that end, the authors chose to examine two current open pedagogy programs in two different higher education settings: one large, research-focused university, hereafter referred to as Large University or LU, and one small, private liberal arts college, hereafter referred to as Small College or SC. Through semi-structured interviews with faculty and staff members working on open education initiatives in various stages of development, the authors sought to compare and contrast the programs and the people involved in these efforts in order to better understand how open pedagogy works in each of these settings. For the purposes of these interviews and this discussion the authors use the term "open pedagogy" in a broad sense, to refer to a large number of open education initiatives, including use/adaptation/development of OER, open textbooks, open software, open data, and other tools and methods of experiential learning that focus on students as active creators and sharers of information and not simply as passive consumers of it. Put simply, the authors view open pedagogy as the use of any OER to support teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Existing literature has found a number of barriers to OER adoption in higher education, including faculty concerns about quality, absence of institutional support, and lack of ancillary materials (Annand & Jensen, 2017; Baraniuk et al., 2017; Bell, 2018; Hassall & Lewis, 2016; Hendricks et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2017; Murphy, 2013; Saeman & Saeman, 2018; Walz, 2017). However, despite such challenges, research also shows many advantages to OER adoption. One study found that students performed significantly better in classes that used OER, especially students who were part-time, non-white, or Pell-eligible; the same study also found that DFW (D, F, and Withdrawal letter grades) decreased in those classes that adopted OER in place of traditional textbooks (Colvard et al, 2018). Another study found that adopting an open textbook in an introductory physics course at a large research university resulted in significant student savings with little change in learning outcomes, that the open textbook was perceived to be the same or better quality than commercial textbooks used in other courses, and that many students specifically appreciated that the textbook was customized to the course they were taking (Hendricks et al., 2017). A similar open pedagogy program at a Canadian university has proven to be of financial benefit to the university as a whole, addressing long-term sustainability concerns: "Operating costs are lowered when OER is adopted because the University's tuition fees include the costs of all instructional materials" (Annand & Jensen, 2017, p. 11). Further research has

pointed out other benefits to OER adoption, including easy access to materials in web browsers and on mobile devices, delays in financial aid no longer contributing to delays in access to course materials, and of course, significant cost savings to students (DeRosa & Robison, 2017; Jung et al., 2017; Saeman & Saeman, 2018).

The most interesting benefits of OER adoption in higher education are the implications for opening up the classroom to more engaging and innovative instructional techniques. DeRosa and Robison (2017) call this not just open textbooks but opening textbooks (along with all sorts of other educational materials and processes and pedagogies and instruction): "When we think about OER as something we do rather than something we find/adopt/acquire, we begin to tap their full potential for learning" (p. 122). OER adoption is one small step that can lead to more open pedagogy practices in the classroom, such as having students create "renewable assignments"—where students openly publish their assignments and share them with a wider community—as opposed to the usual "disposable assignments" that are only ever seen by an instructor (Jhangiani, 2017a; Wiley, 2013). Open pedagogy more broadly is characterized by a number of elements, including: giving students control over their own learning journeys; allowing for information to be shared, knowledge to be co-created, and informal learning to be valued; supporting autonomous learning and the development of critical social consciousness; integrating participatory technologies such as social networks and mobile apps; and developing trust, confidence, and openness for collaborating with others (Hegarty, 2015; Smyth et al., 2016). Many colleges and universities talk about preparing students to be global citizens, and open education prepares students to work in a collaborative world where they will be expected to take responsibility for their own learning (Masterman, 2016).

Librarians are rarely identified as a source of information about OER (Bell, 2018), but the authors have found evidence that faculty collaboration with librarians and other instructional support staff can help surmount many of the traditional barriers to OER adoption, as will be seen in our discussion below. As West (2017) states, "Another level of putting students at the center of open-education initiatives is inviting student voice to the planning and implementation of overall projects. Librarians can assist in this conversation, because students often see libraries as safe places to share opinions and ideas" (p. 145). Librarians may also have specific training in issues around copyright and scholarly communications and are frequently required to obtain an expertise in the large-scale machinations of scholarly publishing that few faculty have the opportunity to gain. While it is ultimately up to individual faculty members to find, evaluate, and adopt OER in their individual courses, librarians and other instructional support staff (such as instructional designers) are frequently best suited to provide expertise and education that alleviates faculty stress in areas such as publishing platforms, content formatting and design, and copyright and licensing issues.

Methodology

Institutional Background

The study was conducted across two mid-Atlantic institutions, differing primarily in size. Table 1 below provides some additional background on the two institutions that may be pertinent to the observed trends.

Table 1

Background Information on the Two Institutions in the Study

Parameters	**Large University (LU)**	**Small College (SC)**
Approximate FTE	80,000+	1000
University Type	Public, Non-Profit	Private, Non-Profit
Carnegie Classification	R1 (Large, Doctoral Granting)	M3 (Small, Masters Granting)
Online Programs	Primarily Residential with Online Degree Programs	Primarily Residential with Online Courses

Data Collection and Analysis

To better understand the administrative structures and motivations at work in each of the higher education settings, the authors performed semi-structured interviews with faculty, librarians, and staff at the two institutions. Potential participants with involvement in OER were identified by the authors or by other participants during the interviews, in order to get as full a view of the network of OER contributors as possible. At SC, interviews were requested from all identified individuals while at LU, the authors sought to interview a representative cross section of individual roles, subject areas, and OER project types.

The interview protocol, shared in the Appendix, focused on determining the nature of the OER work done by the individual, their motivations, and the structural incentives and barriers to OER development, adaptation, and implementation.

Between the two institutions, the authors interviewed 11 individuals (three individuals at SC and eight at LU). Though a sample size of three may not accurately reflect individuals at all smaller institutions, this number represented nearly the entire population of individuals involved in OER in any respect at the smaller

institution at this time, and other small colleges are likely to have similarly small populations of early OER adopters.

All interviews were performed through virtual-conferencing software by the authors and recorded for later analysis. The audio was then transcribed with the Otter.ai software tool, with the authors fixing any errors they could find in those transcriptions. They then applied some basic thematic coding (adapted from Yin, 2009) to help draw out common themes in the discussions.

Discussion

The focus of this research was to compare and contrast open pedagogy efforts at large and small, higher education settings. Overall, the authors observed more similarities than differences, with the observed differences following logically from the institutional structures found at each setting. Mirroring the format of the interview protocol, the authors will discuss the similarities and differences in the individuals involved, their motivations, structural incentives, and structural barriers.

Individuals Involved

The first similarity that emerged in the data was the variety of individuals involved and their general roles. In all observed cases, course instructors took the central role for any individual project. With course materials selection in their hands, course instructors (or at least faculty committees or department chairs) had the final say in what materials they used in their classrooms. These instructors were a combination of tenured, tenure-track, and full-time teaching faculty. One group that was absent from the OER landscape at both institutions was adjunct instructors. Developing, and to a lesser extent, even adopting OER in the classroom is a long-term and time-consuming process. With limited time and limited job security, it is logical that adjunct faculty on year-to-year or even semester-to-semester contracts are not typically engaging in these initiatives.

One difference observed between the two settings was the age of the projects. At SC, the OER projects were only a couple of years old at the most, while at LU many of the projects were much older and longer-running. While it's difficult to generalize, it would seem OER adoption and advocacy at SC were lagging behind LU, likely due to the fact that LU's open education initiatives were established quite a few years before SC began working on open education advocacy, due to increased availability of staff and financial resources at LU specifically and at larger institutions in general.

In the non-instructor roles, librarians and other support staff served as OER advocates and educators, connecting and assisting faculty as needed. In both cases, librarians served a central role, though the exact nature of their jobs differed across the two higher education settings. At SC, OER advocacy and support served as one job responsibility among many for a single librarian's position. At LU, one librarian as well as a small staff office of three other people had jobs completely centered on OER. As the institutions get larger, librarians and staff will wind up with more specialized and focused roles. With that narrow focus comes a much larger

audience, however, with one OER-focused staff person at LU having reported meeting with more than 100 individual faculty members over a time period of just six months. As this represents more than twice the entire faculty body at SC, it highlights the differences in scope of these positions. Despite this, librarians and staff at both institutions reported the same kinds of activities: specifically, advocating OER to the larger institution and then assisting individual faculty who come forward looking to implement open pedagogy in their own curricula.

Motivations to Develop or Adopt OER

Across both large and small university settings, similar patterns emerged with regards to motivation. At the core of the majority of faculty's initial decisions to adopt or develop OER was the high cost of traditional textbooks for students. Some representative statements from faculty below illustrate this point.

> **SC 3** "And, you know, I don't know how familiar you are with the students at [*Small College*], most of them are like first-generation college, a lot of them don't have the money to spend on expensive, like having huge expenses on their books, and so forth."
>
> **LU 2** "And then as publishers, like Pearson, in particular, have become a lot more predatory, the way that they release new editions very quickly to kind of undercut the used-book market on the students. I found that very offensive."

Mirroring this focus on cost is the title of LU's program that monetarily supports OER adoption and development, which includes the word "affordable." Though this program supports the development of open content, it is important to note that the key word in that program's title is "affordable" instead of "open." While this has the effect of stressing the importance of cost reduction, it also adds to the confusion that the authors commonly see about what truly counts as open content versus content that is available at no cost to students but is not openly licensed, such as library subscription materials.

In addition to the growing unease with regard to the cost of textbooks (e.g., Senack, 2015), the authors also commonly found that one specific person or event was the precipitating factor in causing faculty members to begin seriously examining OER. This was sometimes the fact that a new edition of the currently used textbook was released, prompting faculty to investigate potentially making a change in course materials. Sometimes this was an email or other communication from a campus librarian. Sometimes this was hearing from another faculty member about a project they worked on. It was usually nothing huge, but a small external nudge to set things in motion seemed to be common among our interviewees and was something people specifically remembered.

> **LU 2** "I'm moving away from using standard textbooks. In large part because of the release of a new edition of the textbook that we designed the online courses to work with. It was such an earth-shattering change, it was a brand new co-author. And it was such a massive change, that we decided to continue using the old textbook, and then finally decided to just get rid of a textbook, and instead use freely available material online."

> **SC 3** "I think what started it was the email from [librarian] because she kind of laid out a nice plan of like, hey, these resources are available, they're free, they're very comparable to what our students are getting while paying an exorbitant amount of money."

While textbook costs were the most commonly cited motivation, other motivations were also mentioned. Among these were broader issues of access to content, particularly when considering students in online courses.

> **LU 2** "And the other major factor was the fact that I have students all over the world in my online courses, and someone in rural India, for example, doesn't necessarily have the opportunity to get a textbook that someone here domestically would have."

> **LU 8** "And so that model, that model of equivalent access is really important to me. So not identical, but for online students, what can we be doing that provides an equivalent model to what we're doing, or serving, with our residential students."

There was also sometimes a more philosophical motivation for the knowledge to be open and public.

> **SC 1** "For me, there's a kind of bigger, there's a kind of philosophical grain to this, that really resonates with me. And so the idea of creating alternative spaces or venues and pathways to the development of and sharing of knowledge, I think is really important."

Sometimes OER authors simply were not content with the commercial resources available and decided to make their own content open.

> **LU 1** "Originally, it was because when I, back when I was a grad student, I noticed a need for software of some kind to do this job. And I was disappointed with my options. And that disappointment never really went away. And so I started writing my own software that did the job and started sharing it."

> **LU 6** "Well, I have never found a text that I liked for this course, and I've been teaching for 20... this is my 26th year, I guess. And I've used many different texts in this course, never found one that really satisfied what I need."

Though motivations varied from person to person, there was no evidence that the common themes in motivation differed between the interviewees in the large and small higher education settings.

Structural Incentives for OER

In terms of structural incentives for OER, an apparent difference between the large and small university was the existence of a program to provide some monetary support to faculty looking to adopt or author OER content for their classrooms. With large universities come larger budgets, making monetary support specifically for OER more common at large universities. Despite this difference, the existence of monetary support did not seem to be the key element in support for OER. Instead, connections and individual interactions seemed to be far more crucial. Those who received financial support appreciated it and the university recognition that came with it, but as illustrated in some of the comments below, the importance of personal support and interactions

played a large role regardless of university setting or size. Here are some representative responses to questions on how faculty members felt well-supported in OER adoptions or development:

> **SC 2** "So I appreciate, you know, that I have a contact person [a librarian] that I can say, Okay, this is what I'm looking for. Can you help me? And know that there's someone to work with me at each stage."

> **LU 6** "Well, okay, so that whole team has been really helpful up there. I mean, I think it's been just a really, like five or six people, I've gone up to [LU] and just sat in a room with five or six people, and they'll stay with me the whole day and really help me get through stuff and be really, really helpful."

Clearly, these personal connections are important, and the complexity of these networks will vary with the size of the campus; however, once any support system has been established, it may be that quality of support matters more than quantity.

Faculty members who had been working with OER for more than a year all reported advocating OER to others around them. As time goes on and more people become involved in OER, there will be more advocates and likely more people investigating and adopting open education practices.

As a side note related to funding, though OER development was only explicitly supported by an internal funding source at LU, one of the three faculty members at SC had received grant funding via a general faculty professional development fund. Even if OER-specific funding is not available, there may be non-specific funding available for OER development activities, which can help provide support and incentive to encourage adoption of open pedagogy practices.

The final incentive for faculty seemed to be the students. While students did not expect or demand OER, it appears that the faculty interviewed here universally perceived a positive student reaction once OER were implemented, providing instructors an incentive to continue the use of OER in their classrooms.

> **LU 6** "But overall, I did do like an evaluation at the end of the semester, to ask how they liked it. And it was like, overwhelmingly positive, it really was 90% or better in terms of the positive category on every question I asked in terms of how you were using it, how you liked it, compared to a traditional text, how, you know, how useful was this?"

Structural Barriers to OER

In terms of structural barriers, the biggest things holding people back in both settings seemed to be time and the uncertainty of the value of OER development and adoption. It understandably takes a lot of time to develop OER. Pretty much all interviewees acknowledged this and all also acknowledged that they have busy schedules that limit the time they can put into these projects. Additionally, though most interviewees felt that OER was supported by department or campus administrators, they were uncertain how OER was valued in comparison to other activities on which they could spend their time. While this is less of a concern

for tenured faculty members, tenure-track and fixed-term instructors may struggle to determine the value of these activities, particularly in relation to promotion, tenure, and contract renewal.

> **SC 2** "I feel on my own in the sense that if I do this, it's going to take a lot of time. If I do come up with my own, you know, open-access source, and I don't know, I don't have a whole lot of faith that I would get administrative support in terms of getting maybe a course release or any kind of funding. There are, I mean there are some funding grants that the college gives, although they're more for, I'm not sure that developing my own OER would be kind of considered within the scholarly projects that those grants fund. Does that make sense?"

> **LU 5** "It is not the sort of thing, or at least I haven't been able to make it the sort of thing, that will lead to promotion to full professor; that is, I have struggled with what venues and what to put in refereed journals. So in a certain respect, I'm happily supported and happy, find fulfillment through the progress of my students, through the support of colleagues, the support of my administrators. But there is a bit of a struggle trying to navigate the traditional promotion and tenure process with such a portfolio."

> **LU 6** "The writing's all mine, right? I mean, there's no time allotted for it. That's a little frustrating and tiring, I would say. It would be really cool if there were a course release, or, you know, there was a day set aside that that's what I could do. But it's, you know... this is evening and weekend work."

For the interviewed participants, without an official peer review process and without clear publication dates (as many of these are ongoing projects), it is not clear how OER fits in as a publication on a faculty dossier. In terms of funding, the grant itself, regardless of amount, may be useful in establishing the legitimacy of the endeavor. The smaller grants usually available to support OER development and adoption also may have more perceived significance in settings where there is a lower expectation of grant funding, such as SC.

One difference that emerged between settings was the role of university bureaucracy hindering OER implementation in the LU. Though this was not a significant barrier, it arose twice during our interviews, as illustrated in the comments below:

> **LU 1** "The issue was live content. [LU] was way too concerned about security. So they would not give us a [LU] address to host the project from, but [support person] tried, she really did."

> **LU 2** "Well, right now I am waiting for [LU] risk management to finally approve a contract for me to, in essence, write my own OER textbook for one of my two online survey courses.... And, you know, we had gone through everything, I'm still waiting to see an MOU. And basically, it's just sitting with risk management for some reason."

Both instances seemed to revolve around perceived risk, which large universities may be more attuned to, and which relate directly to the concerns about long-term sustainability that have been mentioned previously.

Conclusions

These interviews indicate that the structural barriers and incentives to OER adoption are remarkably similar regardless of institution size. While these interviews are too few in number to be widely generalizable, their consistency in identifying the same sorts of challenges and incentives is promising. Faculty and staff at both LU and SC identify common incentives, such as personalized support and positive student feedback, as well as common barriers, such as the amount of time required to find and incorporate content and uncertainty in how OER efforts are rewarded; these findings concur with what has been previously identified in the literature. Additionally, though faculty at both institutions note that grant funding, tenure and promotion concerns, and course releases (i.e., additional time) are incentives for beginning to work on open education initiatives, the authors are impressed to discover that many faculty choose to look into open pedagogy practices because of advocacy from peers or strong philosophical beliefs in open culture, especially at SC where there currently are no direct financial incentives available for OER efforts. While the authors absolutely believe that faculty and staff deserve compensation for their work, they are heartened to see that other people are starting to understand the importance and potential impact of open education, and that OER adopters are enthusiastically advocating OER to their colleagues.

The major differences that the authors discovered between large and small institutions has to do primarily with structural and administrative support. It is clear that a larger institution such as LU has more opportunities for funding and more staff to support open initiatives; however, it is noted by some interviewees that this also results in more bureaucratic hurdles. LU is observed to have longer-standing OER projects than SC. With more budget constraints and a lack of staff time for training and development, smaller colleges may struggle to get OER efforts rolling, but once new programs are started, there is frequently less bureaucratic structure to contend with and new ideas can be implemented a little more nimbly. For example, faculty at SC do not need permission from a department chair to make changes to course materials or instructional methods and have a little more freedom to experiment with open pedagogy tools in their classrooms, while faculty at LU in large enrollment courses may be tied to a more standardized curriculum across multiple sections of a course.

The authors are also encouraged to see repeated references to librarian and staff support at both institutions. Personal support seems to be the single, most important incentive for OER development and implementation in the eyes of faculty, and this personal support is offered almost entirely by librarians and staff. Many of the barriers discussed—how to locate OER, where to get started with open pedagogy, identifying funding sources, advocating for more inclusive promotion and tenure requirements, evaluating copyright and other intellectual property implications—are issues in which librarians and instructional design staff are specifically trained.

Throughout this chapter, the authors have taken a broad view of what constitutes open pedagogy and have focused primarily on OER adoption efforts. This is where many open pedagogy initiatives naturally start, and it is where the primary work of the programs at both LU and SC reside. However, both types of schools are in a good position to begin expanding their open pedagogy initiatives to incorporate more inclusive and student-centered classroom activities and assignments. Many OER efforts concentrate on cost,

and as seen in the interviews, cost is a major motivator for faculty to begin investigating traditional textbook alternatives; however, the benefits of open education go far beyond cost reduction for students. As open education grows into its adolescence, this is an area that deserves more concentration, and this also is an area where collaborations between librarians, faculty, and other instructional and support staff can truly shine.

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Feedback, suggestions, or conversation about this chapter may be shared via our Rebus Community Discussion Page.

Appendix: Interview Protocol

Please describe the nature of your job at your institution.

- Do you have any teaching responsibilities?
- Do you manage others in an official or unofficial role?
- Do you advise others in teaching roles?
- Does your job description involve OER advocacy explicitly?

Please describe your involvement with Open Educational Resources at your institution.

- What inspired you to pursue this/these efforts?
- Were there people or programs in particular that lead to your involvement in OER?
- Have you specifically advocated OER to others?

(Only for those running OER efforts) What programs or services do you offer to support OER adoption?

- What do you offer for those looking to adopt OER?
- What do you offer for those looking to author OER?
- Is there monetary support available for either?
- Are there explicit support staff reaching out to faculty?
- How long do these programs last?

(Only for those implementing OER) Describe the nature of the OER you have implemented / developed for your classroom.

- What institutional support, if any, did you receive before and during implementation?
- What people were offering support for OER implementation (what jobs do these people have)?
- Was there monetary support offered for adopting / adapting / authoring?
- In what ways did you feel well-supported in the process?
- In what ways did you feel on your own in the process?
- How did the OER implementation go over with students?

To what extent do you feel the time you put into OER implementation / advocacy is rewarded as part of your job?

- Do the administrators above you support OER in the classroom?
- Have they put specific programs or policies into place regarding OER?
- Does your work with OER come up during job performance reviews?
- Does OER come up during your review of others?