Piloting Faculty OER Grant Programs: A Practical Guide for Librarians

SPARC✳

Open Education Leadership Program

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Introduction

I began this project wanting to think through the best way to launch a library-led OER grant program for faculty within the specific context of a liberal arts college. As a newly minted Scholarly Communications librarian at a liberal arts college who had been hired to advocate for and support the use of OER on campus, it seemed like a good choice. But much of what I have learned is applicable to most institutional contexts, from large research universities to smaller community colleges. Ultimately, I found that the kind of courses you would like to target for OER support matters far more than the kind of school at which you work.

I decided to design a pilot grant program aimed at supporting OER creation because I realized that faculty teaching advanced, interdisciplinary, and topical courses currently have far fewer openly licensed resources available to them. While the Scholarly Communications Department at Musselman library will continue to support faculty working to adopt or adapt pre-existing OER, the grant program will fund creation projects for faculty teaching courses that lack viable OER from which to choose.

Concentrating on the liberal arts college environment did bear some fruit. While not wanting to rely on an overgeneralization, I would say that the specific context of a liberal arts college matters most in area of OER when it comes to advocacy and outreach. If one were to make a list of hallmarks a liberal arts college, an emphasis on teaching and pedagogy would surely be among them. Arguments and programs in support of OER that emphasize the power of openly licensed resources to improve learning outcomes and transform course assignments may therefore have a warmer reception from faculty and administrators at a liberal arts college. It may, for example, be easier to make the case that OER creation should count towards tenure and promotion at an institution that places greater or equal weight on faculty teaching ability as research and publication. While the monetary savings to students should be a major motivator for the spread of OER, the pedagogical benefits are equally important and can sometimes be more persuasive to certain audiences. Again, this point may be more pertinent at a liberal arts

college, but it is hard to imagine an institutional context in which promoting the pedagogical benefits of OER would not be advisable.

In addition to being free in digital form, openly-licensed resources allow educators to devise assignments and redesign courses in ways unavailable to them when using traditionally copyrighted resources. Not only do instructors gain the ability to edit and improve upon the texts they assign, customizing them to perfectly suit the needs of the course, but students can interact with the texts in new ways as well. Exemplary student work from each semester can be added to new editions of the text which will be used by future classes. Assignments can involve creating new infographics illustrating textbook content or critical introductions to readings that are then added to an ongoing anthology. Librarians will recognize the ways that such assignments align with the ACRL [Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education](), especially the idea that "Authority is Constructed and Contextual" and understanding "Information Creation as a Process." Professors and instructional designers may recognize this model better under the heading of "publishing as pedagogy." But students need not contribute to open resources to obtain educational benefits from using them. As Robin DeRosa and Scott Robinson explain in discussing a course they co-taught, it is about establishing a new relationship between learner and course content:

> By replacing a static textbook — or other stable learning material — with one that is openly licensed, faculty have the opportunity to create a new relationship between learners and the information they access in the course. Instead of thinking of knowledge as something students need to download into their brains, we start thinking of knowledge as something continuously created and revised. Whether students participate in the development and revision of OER or not, this redefined relationship between students and their course "texts" is central to the philosophy of learning that the course espouses. If faculty involve their students in interacting with OER, this relationship becomes even more explicit, as students are expected to critique and contribute to the body of knowledge from which they are learning. In this sense, knowledge is less a product that has

distinct beginning and end points and is instead a process in which students can engage, ideally beyond the bounds of the course.[1]

While not normally listed as a High-Impact Practice (HIP) in itself, DeRosa and Robinson illustrate why the use of openly-licensed resources can enhance and facilitate traditional HIPs like undergraduate research and service-learning.[2]

Since faculty OER grant and incentive programs are relatively new to academia, the best method of research proved to be reading about the ones already underway and learning from the people making them work. Based on my analysis of relevant websites, library guides, and my discussions with colleagues online and in person, I have created the following resource to help others considering starting an OER grant program.

Over the course of the project, I found myself compiling the most important questions we at Gettysburg needed to answer to determine whether and what kind of a grant program was best for us. *Part One* of this resource is therefore an organized list of the questions I found most crucial in assessing whether such a program is the best next step for our campus and what it should look like if it is to be successful and sustainable. *Part Two* is a collection of online resources related to Open Pedagogy and the use of OER in the undergraduate classroom. Learning about the successful implementation of OER by their peers can be a very powerful argument for faculty. I therefore have included links to several websites and works that offer examples of open pedagogy in practice. Readers will also find resources that define Open Pedagogy and place it within the larger context of the Open Education movement. Finally, *Part Three* is comprised of the proposal I developed for a pilot grant program at Gettysburg College. Readers will

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[1] Robin DeRosa and Scott Robinson, "Pedagogy, Technology, and the Example of Open Educational Resources," *EDUCAUSE Review*, 9 November 2015. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2015/11/pedagogy-technology-and-the-example-of-open-educational-resources

[2] For a definition and explanation of High-Impact Practices in higher education, see the website of the National Survey of Student Engagement and specifically the handout "Engagement Indicators & High-Impact Practices." http://nsse.indiana.edu/pdf/EIs_and_HIPs_2015.pdf

also find links to the programs at other schools I found most helpful to consult while putting together my proposal.

This is the first iteration of what I hope will become a handbook for librarians containing practical advice, model documentation, and curated compilations of particularly valuable resources to be consulted and shared with interested campus stakeholders. If you have suggestions for improvements or materials to be included in future versions of this resource, please send them to me at cbarnesphd@gmail.com. And, of course, feel free to remix this content since I am sharing it under a CC-BY-NC license.

Part One: Questions to Consider

The following questions will help you think through the numerous factors that should be considered when contemplating and designing a pilot OER grant program for faculty.

1. What is the OER climate on campus?

    a. What is the level of awareness among faculty concerning OER?
    b. Are any faculty currently using OER?
    c. Are there any faculty who have championed OER adoption by their colleagues?
    d. Are there any faculty, chairs, or departments that are publicly opposed to OER?
    e. What reception have your OER outreach efforts received?
    f. Are there faculty using OER who would be willing to help oversee the program or judge applications?
    g. What level and kind of support are you receiving from top-level administrators like the president, provost, and deans?
    h. Would an OER grant program align with institutional mission or vision statements concerning pedagogical innovation, diversity and inclusion, or affordability?
    i. Is there any funding available to launch a pilot OER grant program for faculty?
    j. Is the student body aware of OER and their possible effect on the Textbook Crisis? How have they responded to OER programming?
    k. Is the student government willing to support your program either financially or politically?
    l. Could faculty receive release time instead of or in addition to a grant?
    m. Does the library have staff and resources to devote to this pilot?

2. What kinds of OER projects will you fund?

   a. What kinds of OER projects will receive the most campus-wide support?
   b. If there is a lack of awareness regarding OER among faculty, would funding faculty reviews of OER in their disciplines be worthwhile given the way they increase awareness and often lead to adoption?[3]
   c. Is it too soon to offer grants for modifying or creating open textbooks given the level of support required in terms of training faculty to use editing platforms?
   d. Will you fund different kinds of OER projects simultaneously or would a tiered approach - first reviews, then adoption, then adaptation and creation - enable you to better support faculty?
   e. How many grants can be offered based on funding and amount per grant? What would be sustainable?
   f. Can faculty use the grant to pay students to do work like transcription and proofreading?
   g. Can faculty keep the grant money if they do all the work themselves?

3. Who will you fund?

   a. Funding full-time faculty increases the likelihood that the OER and the courses using it will benefit the campus in the long term.
   b. Funding only full-time faculty will reduce the number of applications and possibly exclude individuals with the best OER ideas.
   c. Can two faculty members jointly apply for a grant? Can three?
   d. Can more than one faculty member in a department receive a grant?
   e. Will applicants need to obtain the blessing of their departments or department chairs to ensure the OER and its associated class(es) will be implemented and have a chance of being used in future classes? If so,

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[3] Ethan Senack, "Open Textbooks: The Billion-Dollar Solution," *The Student PIRGs*, February 2015. https://studentpirgs.org/sites/student/files/reports/The%20Billion%20Dollar%20Solution.pdf

what form will that blessing take (i.e. a letter from the chair, a vote from the department)?

   f. Will you evenly divide awards based on division or will at least one award go to Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Humanities?

4. How will grant applications be judged?

   a. What criteria will you use to judge the strength of the grant applications?
   b. Who will judge the applications?
   c. Could applications be reviewed by faculty already using OER?
   d. Could people from outside of the library help judge applications so as to generate more buy-in across campus?
   e. Will applications relating to courses with high enrollment be given more weight than smaller ones?
   f. Will applications proposing OER that can be used in multiple courses be given more weight?
   g. Will you use a rubric and will it be available to faculty completing their applications?

5. How will the grants be administered?

   a. What milestones should be created in the grant materials to ensure timely progress by all involved?
   b. What people or departments outside the library can help administer the grant?
   c. What timeline would work best with your school's administrative and curricular calendar so as to ensure timely authorization of funding, approval of applications, payment of grants, and so on?
   d. Will anyone oversee with the rollout of the OER in the targeted course or help with assessment?
   e. Who will write the checks to the faculty?

f. When and how will grant recipients be paid?

g. Will you be expected to gather sensitive data like social security numbers?

h. Will tax forms need to be generated for grant recipients?

i. Creating a timeline or list of milestones will help keep everyone on schedule.

j. Will you have regular check-in meetings or require progress reports?

k. Will the grant recipients be treated as a cohort to facilitate the sharing of ideas and the discussion of problems?

6. Who will provide technological, pedagogical, or copyright support?

a. Are you in a position to help grant recipients with pedagogical questions or would teaming up with the Teaching & Learning center on campus?

b. When a grant recipient has a technical question about HTML or using Pressbooks, will you be prepared to answer it or will you be able to send them to someone on campus?

c. Are there instructional designers who could help awardees with technical platform problems and accessibility concerns?

d. Is there a copyright committee or informal group of librarians to whom you could turn with questions related to licenses and permissions? Could one be formed?

e. Can someone's job description be changed so that the support they provide the grant program is not considered extraneous work?

7. What will the timeline be for promotion, application, approval, implementation, and assessment?

a. How will you promote the grants to faculty across your campus?

b. Will certain kinds of larger projects (i.e. OER creation) only be funded in the fall semester so that faculty and librarians can have time to work on them over the summer?

c. Will faculty be expected to work on their OER projects over the summer?

d. Will different kinds of projects be funded simultaneously or will there be a multi-year, multi-phased approach moving from reviews, to adoption, to adaptation and creation?

8. What conditions must be met for the faculty member to fulfill the terms of the grant?

a. How will faculty be educated on Creative Commons licenses and which ones will they be allowed to use given concerns over accessibility and adaptability?

b. Will awardees need to compose an evaluative report?

c. Will awardees be required to share their experiences with campus colleagues?

d. Will awardees be required to help judge the next year's grant applications?

9. How will the grants be assessed?

a. What will success look like?

b. How will you gather feedback from awardees?

c. What kind of information from students would be most useful for improving the grant program and assessing pedagogical effectiveness?

d. What kind of information will allow administrators to determine whether to continue funding the program?

e. What kind of information would be most useful to persuading additional faculty to apply?

10. How will the grants be advertised and promoted?

a. Which upper-level administrators would be willing to email the campus to promote the grants and lend their support?

b. Is there an annual campus event at which you could make a presentation or poster?

c. Are there faculty who have already experimented with OER who would be willing to speak about their experiences as part of a panel?

d. Would promotional events during either Open Access Week or Open Education Week line up well with your planned application timetable?

11. How will awardees and their work be recognized on campus?

a. Are there campus events at which you could announce the awards and the individual projects?

b. Could faculty receive credit towards tenure and promotion for participating?

c. How would the grant appear as a line on their CV?

d. Is there funding for a celebration of awardees and their work which could double as a promotional event?

Part Two: Open Pedagogy Resources and Readings

The term "open pedagogy" refers to the study of educational theories and practices tied to the use of openly-licensed educational resources. Born out of the realization that OER allow students and teachers to interact with course content in innovative ways that can enhance traditional learning methods and make new ones possible, open pedagogy is a rapidly expanding field being fueled by OER experimentation around the world. The following list of readings and websites are intended to provide a sampling of recent work and writing in the field.

Defining Open Pedagogy

1. [Attributes of Open Pedagogy: A Model for Using Open Educational Resources](#)

2. [Open Digital Pedagogy = Critical Pedagogy](#)

3. [Open Access as Undergraduate Pedagogy](#)

4. [Pedagogy, Technology, and the Example of Open Educational Resources](#)

5. [The Benefits of Open Pedagogy: A Student Perspective](#)

6. [Open Pedagogy and the First Year Seminar](#)

Open Pedagogy in Practice

1. [A Guide to Making Open Textbooks with Students](#)

2. [Open Pedagogy Notebook](#)

3. [The Non-Disposable Assignment: Case Studies](#)

4. [OER-Enabled Pedagogy: Examples from the Real World](#)

5. [Publishing as Pedagogy: Connecting Library Services and Technology](#)

From Open Pedagogy to Open Education

Part Three: Proposal for Pilot OER Grant Program

As stated in the introduction, faculty teaching courses that are advanced, interdisciplinary, or topical face a significant barrier to implementing OER because of the relative lack of pre-existing resources that could be easily adopted or adapted. I have therefore drafted a proposal for a pilot OER grant program that focuses exclusively on the creation of new OER. For Gettysburg College, I have therefore designed a proposal for a pilot OER grant program that focuses exclusively on the creation of new OER. I share this draft proposal to illustrate how the questions and considerations in Part I can be used to craft an OER outreach proposal suitable to a specific institutional context.

While crafting the following proposal, I consulted many of the OER grant programs in place at research universities such as Virginia Tech, UMass Amherst, Oklahoma, and Kansas State. At the time of writing, Macalester College is one of the few LAC in the United States with an active OER grant program which supports OER creation. Ron Joslin, the librarian at Macalester who oversees that program, generously offered feedback and advice regarding the development of this pilot proposal for Gettysburg College.

Gettysburg College Faculty OER Grant Program Proposal for Pilot

"Encourage and support innovative teaching and learning techniques and pedagogies."

-- *Innovation Goal #1*,
The Unfinished Work: A Strategic Direction for Gettysburg College

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A collaboration between Musselman Library and the Johnson Center for Creative Teaching & Learning to fund and support faculty creation of open textbooks and other kinds of openly-licensed educational resources.

Background: The Textbook Crisis

The prices for textbooks and other kinds of college course materials have risen dramatically in the last thirty years. According to the College Board, "the yearly books-and-supplies in-state estimate for the average full-time undergraduate student at a four-year public college is about $1,298."[4] Such costs constitute a real barrier for the increasing number of students who cannot afford to pay them out-of-pocket or through loans. As a result, students are taking a number of steps to cut costs that can impede their learning and course performance. They will share books, only buy some of the required materials, use outdated or inferior editions, take fewer courses per semester, or switch to a different section of the course. In some cases, the average cost of course materials for a given discipline will factor into a student's selection of major(s) and minor(s). This state of affairs has come to be called the "Textbook Crisis" and one of the

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[4] See https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/college-costs/quick-guide-college-costs. See also Tyler Kingkade, "College Textbook Prices Increasing Faster Than Tuition And Inflation," Huffington Post, 6 December 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/04/college-textbook-prices-increase_n_2409153.html

steps colleges and universities have taken to ameliorate it is the creation of programs that support faculty interested in adopting, adapting, or creating open educational resources (OER).

OER at GBC

OER are learning materials - textbooks, workbooks, readings, assignments, exercises - that are licensed by their creators so that users can freely access them digitally and legally edit, combine, and re-distribute them. Open textbooks run the gamut from a Word document with links to online readings in the public domain to a peer-reviewed work with multiple authors and cutting-edge graphics that is indistinguishable from its highly-priced commercial rivals. OpenStax, a leading provider of open textbooks based at Rice University, offers open textbooks for most disciplines at the introductory level that can be freely accessed online by students and edited by their professors. For students interested in a physical text, OpenStax offers hardcopies which can be purchased online or in college bookstores for prices in the $30 to $50 price range. Since the fall of 2014, several Gettysburg College faculty have assigned Openstax textbooks in their courses and others have adopted OER from other providers as either their primary course text or as supplementary readings. Another faculty member switched from an expensive literary anthology to a reading list of free works found in the public domain. In the spring of 2018, four members of the faculty responded to a series of survey questions concerning their use of OER. Their responses can be found on the homepage of the library guide, "Open Education @ Gettysburg College."

The faculty members who have already experimented with or formally switched to OER represent only a fraction of those who have expressed interest in OER and the Open Access (OA) movement more generally. The Scholarly Communications Department of Musselman Library keeps track of faculty who have attended workshops and presentations related to OA/OER, contacted the library about such issues, or otherwise indicated an interest in openly-licensed scholarly content. As of spring 2018, the list maintained by Scholarly Communications contains 47 names or 15% of the college's 234 full-time and approximately 80 part-time faculty members.

The Proposed Pilot

This pilot grant program has been designed to meet the growing need for more formalized support for faculty interested in using OER and redesigning their courses to maximize the unique pedagogical benefits afforded by teaching with open materials. Currently, the vast majority of OER in general, and open textbooks in particular, are suited for introductory and survey-style courses. Given the difficulty of finding OER that can be readily used in non-introductory courses, this grant program will give preference to applicants proposing the creation of new open resources. The creation of new OER, however, requires more time, resources, and know-how than adoption, meaning that more preparation and collaboration are also needed.

A well-organized, team approach is especially important at liberal arts colleges where it is common for people to have varied job responsibilities and unlikely that any one person could adequately support such a program. Programs grounded in collaboration are also more likely to gain support from key campus stakeholders and to be sustainable, both financially and in terms of workload. Establishing a working relationship with a campus center for teaching and learning, if present, can provide faculty with the kind of support that can help them realize the pedagogical potential of OER.

Proposal Details

Number of pilot grants

1 or 2

Amount of each grant

$3000 dispersed in three payments of $1000 (May 15, January 15, and January 15 of following year)

Potential campus partners

[Johnson Center for Creative Teaching and Learning](#) (JCCTL) and [Office of Educational Technology](#) (OET)

Tentative yearly timeline

Grant promotion and committee member recruitment: December 1 - February 15[5]

Application period: February 1 - March 1

Promotion of grant during Open Education Week: February

Review of proposals and interviews of candidates: March 1 - March 22

Announcement of grant recipients: April 1

Planning meetings with grant recipient, JCCTL, and OET: April 1 - May 1

First third of grant dispersed: May 15

Semi-weekly design meetings (virtual): June 15 - August 15

User experience testing: August 1 - August 15

Rollout of OER in course: fall semester

Monthly faculty feedback and assessment reports: September 15 - November 30

Promotion of grant program during Open Access Week: October

Student assessment survey: December 1 - 7

Faculty assessment report and OER reflection: January 15

Second third of grant dispersed: January 15 (after receipt of report and reflection)

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[5] This period of intensive promotion will be augmented by annual advertising and information sessions during Open Access Week in the fall semester and during Open Education Week in the spring semester. From December 1 to February 15, and in conjunction with the JCCTL, Scholarly Communications will promote the grants through targeted emails to faculty, advertisements in the daily campus electronic newsletter, and posters hung up in halls of academic buildings on campus.

Following fall semester: Course offered again using same OER and involving same assessment and evaluation strategies.

Final third of grant dispersed: January 15 (of following year)

Components of grant proposal

1. Completed application form
2. Statement of OER Interest
3. Current course syllabus and ideas for OER integration
4. Description of ideal OER for course
5. Plan for OER content creation and organization (with links to exemplary websites, ebooks, OER, etc.)
6. Letter of support from department chair with commitment to two semesters

Key Rationale and Considerations

- **Timeline**: Summer is likely the only part of the year during which faculty could have enough time to devote to an OER creation project. For similar reasons, summer is also likely the best time for the library, OET, and JCCTL.

- **Written approval of department**: Having the support of the department and its chair will help ensure the created OER is valued and used. Securing a written commitment to offer the same course with the same professor two years in a row will result in a range of benefits including improvement of the resource, better assessment data, and more savings for students.

- **Grant amount**: Because grant recipients will be asked to work over the summer, meet regularly with the members of the grant committee, produce an evaluative report, and commit to teaching the course two years in a row, the amount of the grant must be sufficiently high to serve as an incentive as well as defray the cost of the time and energy required. Faculty can currently apply for a $1000 Johnson Teaching Grant and a $2000 Johnson Creative Teaching Summer Fellowship,

both of which are designed to reimburse authorized expenses. The OER grants would function more as stipends and not require recipients to itemize expenses. Faculty failing to satisfactorily complete grant obligations would not receive future payments or have them delayed until unmet obligations are fulfilled.

- **Campus partners**: The grant program will be overseen by the Scholarly Communications Librarian, who will be the grant recipient's primary point of contact and be responsible for shepherding the project from promotion to implementation and assessment. Assisting the ScholComm Librarian will be volunteers from the JCCTL, who will help with course redesign and pedagogical questions, and the Office of Educational Technology, who will help with the tools and platforms used to create the OER, as well as integration with our LMS (Moodle).

- **Awardee obligations**: Currently, "Recipients of a JCCTL fellowship or grant must submit a written report at the conclusion of their project and be willing to make one or more presentations about their work in appropriate on-campus venues." This OER grant would build on these requirements in ways designed to encourage and assist other faculty to adopt OER or apply for their own grant. The higher number of requirements, combined with the fact that they are spread out across two academic years, is justification for the higher than average award amount.

- **Pre-existing relationships**: For several years, the JCCTL and the library have been jointly administering multiple faculty grants such as the [Johnson Information Literacy Grant](#) and the [Johnson Teaching with Special Collections Grant](#). It therefore makes sense for this pilot program to follow that model. Furthermore, given the pedagogical nature of OER development, the JCCTL is the most logical campus partner.