Open Educational Resources and Open Textbooks

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Open Educational Resources

What are they and why do they matter?
What is OER?

"Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student or self-learner. Examples of OER include: full courses, course modules, syllabi, lectures, homework assignments, quizzes, lab and classroom activities, pedagogical materials, games, simulations, and many more resources contained in digital media collections from around the world." [OER Commons]
Why OER?

“The idea of free and open sharing in education is not new. In fact, sharing is probably the most basic characteristic of education: Education is sharing knowledge, insights, and information with others, upon which new knowledge, skills, ideas, and understanding can be built.” Open Education Consortium

- Educational resources (e.g. textbooks) cost a lot & are constantly changing
- Instructors like to modify, adapt, reuse, transform their resources
- Digital creation & dissemination of these items is easy and fast
- OER make learning opportunities available to underserved populations
A brief history

- ERIC (pre-WWW)
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Libraries & digital content
- 2002: MIT - OpenCourseWare
- 2007: Cape Town Open Education Declaration (http://www.capetowndeclaration.org/)
  - Calls on educators to use open resources and in turn make their resources open, and declares that Universities should make open education a priority
- 2014: SPARC makes OER a primary topic of its annual meeting
Types of OER

- MOOCs (Massively Open Online Courses)
- Syllabus-sharing websites or archives
- Repositories of course materials (e.g. exercises, exams, lesson plans)
- Open Textbooks
OER at Pitt

- Localized in departments
- Blackboard
- iTunesU
- No University-wide initiative to collect, standardize, and share OER broadly
Open textbooks as a form of OER

- Online
- Free of charge
- Free of access restrictions
- Adaptable, reusable, remixable: Open textbooks often allow others to reuse, adapt, remix, and otherwise alter the work for their own pedagogical purposes
The benefits from open textbooks

- For scholars and disciplines, they represent a way to take ownership of textbook content (e.g., through peer review), to match textbook content with lectures and classroom discussion, to keep content current, to provide easy access to needed content, and to do so at very low cost.
- For administrators and students, they offer a way to reduce educational costs.
- For students accustomed to an increasingly online delivery mechanism, they offer a quick way to get content for their classes.
- For libraries, they offer the opportunity to meet a strong need among their clientele. For some libraries, they also represent a publishing opportunity.
What constitutes a textbook?

“A book used in the study of a subject as a) one containing a presentation of the principles of a subject; b) a literary work relevant to the study of a subject” (Merriam-Webster)

So essentially any book needed to learn a subject is a textbook

Traditionally we think of textbooks as the former definition, “one containing a presentation of the subject,” i.e.,

- A required text for a course
- One that provides an introduction to a subject
- A systematic and sequential approach to the subject
- And examples, exercises, and other ways to measure knowledge
The cost of textbooks

- Between 1987 and 2004, the average price of a college textbook increased twice as fast as the consumer price index, an average of 6% per year.\(^1\)
- This increase (6%) was a higher percentage of increase than the cost of tuition and fees at both public and private institutions experienced over three decades.\(^2\)
- College textbook prices rose 82% between 2003 and 2013.\(^3\)
- The total textbook cost for a typical year of classes was close to $1,000 [2009 data].\(^4\)
- Some 65% of students report not purchasing a textbook because of its high price.\(^5\)
Thus . . .

“The price of textbooks strongly affects the availability of a college education because the ability to attend college is often dependent upon cost.” 6
Textbooks & the ULS: Student and Staff Experiences

- Students seeking textbooks: A growing segment of service desk traffic (desk, E-ZBorrow, ILL)
- Pitt Pathfinders: Availability of textbooks via the ULS is used as a way to sell the library to student and parents
  - Reality check: It is difficult for the library to fulfill these requests
- Reserves: Some leeway to purchase textbooks for reserves
  - Reality check: These new purchases have hundreds of checkouts per term
- E-ZBorrow: High volume of requests at start of each term; small pool to choose from; e-textbooks don’t circulate
- ILL: Increased undergraduate use, primarily for textbooks; subject areas and titles are predictable
  - Reality check: Requests are often unfillable
Thus . . .

- Students often experience 1, 2, and 3 strikes in requesting textbooks.
- This experience may leave students with a negative impression of library services.
What’s next?

- Operational: Create a LibGuide or other information page on OER and open textbook resources at Pitt and beyond
- Operational: Develop a communications plan for discussing with faculty, students, and administrators the use of library reserves, E-ZBorrow, and ILL to textbook needs
- Strategic: Better understand the use of and need for OER and open textbooks at Pitt
- Strategic: Through the Knowledge Commons, provide consultative and technological services to foster the creation and sharing of OER and open textbooks by Pitt teaching faculty
Sources


Sources, continued


Demonstration

- Merlot OER Repository: [http://www.merlot.org](http://www.merlot.org)
- University of Maryland University College LibGuide: [http://libguides.umuc.edu/oer](http://libguides.umuc.edu/oer)
- OpenStax College (Rice University): [http://openstaxcollege.org/](http://openstaxcollege.org/)
- Open Textbook Library (University of Minnesota): [http://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/](http://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/)