Integrating OER Into Curriculum

To expand the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in the California Community Colleges, it is essential to identify mechanisms for integrating OER into existing practices and policies. Faculty should be encouraged to consider OER as readily as they consider commercial texts.

How does OER become an integral part of local processes? Arguably the most effective way is to use the Course Outline of Record (COR), the document that delineates the substance of a course. Although colleges' approaches to many things varies, they are alike with the respect to most of the components included in the COR. The COR must not only include the substance of the course, but also the resource materials that will (or may) be used to teach it. Consequently, a logical starting point for integrating OER into the college's curriculum is to indicate how OER are included in the COR. Presented below are principles and practices to consider in making OER an element of your local processes.

Introduce the Topic

Before you consider how to make OER a part of the curriculum process, you may need to ensure that OER is a known entity at your college. OER can't become a part of your local culture if no one is even aware of it. It's hard to normalize something that no one has even heard of. If OER has not been the subject of conversations in your local senate or curriculum committee, reach out to those who can help you make that happen and spread the word.

Consult Local Experts

As you advocate for the explicit inclusion of OER in your curriculum processes, consult your Articulation Officer (AO) and Curriculum Chair. As the COR is the means of communicating the substance of our courses to our transfer partners, your AO can not only offer guidance with respect to how our CORs are reviewed, but may also have unique insight with respect to the practices and perspectives of your local transfer partners.

Incorporate OER Into the College's Curriculum Handbook

Most colleges have a handbook that guides their curriculum process. Providing faculty with detailed instructions for including OER in a COR ensures faculty know how to include such resources and makes it explicit that OER is acceptable.

Ensure the COR is Honest - and Open

At many colleges, faculty are encouraged to include a representative commercial or "bound" text on the COR. As such texts were once the only option, it is understandable that there would be an interest in maintaining the presence of this traditional standard. In the event, however, that the stated text on the COR is the required text and it is OER, the COR should reflect this. Furthermore, where OER might be used for a course, this should also be stated. As a matter of principle, the COR should accurately document the resources that are or might be used for a course. It is important to keep in mind that the COR is not only the basis for articulation, but it is the formal communication of the substance of a course to all who teach that course. Consequently, documenting the option of using OER is essential for promoting its consideration and adoption.

One advantage of the use of a commercial text is the ready access to information about that text. If the only option on a COR is an OER that is not publically available, that open resource is effectively hidden. As it is critical that anyone reviewing your COR has the ability to review a representative text, ensure that one is provided. As a matter of good practice, any OER employed should be as readily available to students as a commercial text. As you strive for the normalization of OER, consider all elements of access to that OER - not merely integrating it into your curriculum.

Today, many OER providers make OER texts available in various digital formats. In addition, access to a printed copy of your OER may be just a click away. If, however, you have remixed OER within a Canvas course, finding a way to make that OER available for review – and accessible to your students before and after your course – may be a challenge. LibreTexts (LibreTexts.org), an OER development platform, now offers a solution; OER content in Canvas can be imported into LibreTexts, allowing for public access and printing. To explore LibreTexts and its presentation of OER, go to LibreTexts (LibreTexts.org) and access the "library" for your discipline. In addition to offering a mechanism for moving content out of Canvas, you can also request that LibreTexts "harvest" an existing OER into its platform to facilitate customization. Contact the OERI's LibreTexts Liaison, Jennifer Rogers, for more information. (jrogers@libretexts.org)

Seek Outside Assistance

Sometimes the only way to effect local change is to bring in assistance from the outside. The ASCCC OER Initiative (asccc-oeri.org) is here to help you with your local OER advocacy efforts. If we can be of assistance, please let us know. (oeri@asccc.org)