

SPEC Kit 351

Affordable Course Content and
Open Educational Resources
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Survey Results

Executive Summary

Introduction

Academic institutions are increasingly developing programmatic approaches to support the creation, adoption, and adaptation of affordable course content (ACC) and open educational resources (OER) as part of wider strategic initiatives to enhance the access to and affordability of higher education and to improve teaching and learning. Affordable course content may include materials that are library-licensed or available at a low additional cost to students. Open educational resources are one type of affordable content; OER refers to any type or format of content or software that is in the public domain or licensed with a Creative Commons, GNU public license, or any other intellectual property license that allows free use, modification, and redistribution. Such materials share the idea of adaptability, low or no cost to students, and more control for faculty who use them.

In addition to teaching and learning units and faculty development centers, academic libraries often play significant or lead roles in ACC/OER programs. Library expertise in copyright and licensing, networks of faculty relationships, and emerging involvement in instructional design and digital publishing present opportunities to create open education and affordability initiatives that will bear a lasting institution-wide contribution to student academic achievement and faculty engagement. These initiatives are also a quantitative way that libraries may demonstrate their value in enhanced learning opportunities and reduced costs for students.

The purpose of this survey was to determine the degree to which ARL member institutions are engaged in ACC/OER advocacy, support, and development. The survey was designed to gather information on ACC/OER initiatives at the institutional level and the role of the library in these initiatives. It asked about initiatives' origins, implementation, governance, and funding, incentives for faculty participation, and the types of affordable/open course content that have been developed. It also explored library support of ACC/OER activities with staffing and services. The survey was distributed to the 124 ARL member libraries in March 2016. Sixty-five (52%) responded by the April 16 deadline. Of these institutions, 46 have or are planning an ACC/OER initiative. Another 12 plan to investigate the possibility in the near future.

Institutional Initiatives

Campus-wide ACC/OER initiatives are started and sustained by a myriad of actors, generally with the purposes of improving educational quality and reducing student learning resource costs. Responding institutions reported a diverse range of projects that include open courseware initiatives, digital course packs, interactive course companions, open or low-cost textbook adoption/creation, and use of public

domain, openly licensed, library licensed/subscribed materials. Campus-wide ACC/OER initiatives are at times embedded within other teaching and learning initiatives.

The survey asked which entity originated the ACC/OER initiative and which are involved in implementing it. Respondents indicated that their libraries have taken the lead in originating ACC/OER efforts well over half of the time (29 of 45 responses, or 64%). Higher-level administration, such as a president, provost, or vice provost, is the second most frequent initiator of their institution's ACC/OER initiatives (17 or 38%). Other initiators include extension, distance learning, or colleges/academic units, instructional design groups, student organizations, the university bookstore, and local or regional consortia. Notably, only two respondents reported that a faculty development or faculty governance group had originated their ACC/OER initiatives.

Libraries are more likely to be involved in implementing (33 or 73%) than in originating an initiative. Other entities showing high levels of involvement in implementation include teaching and learning groups (16 or 36%), instructional design groups (15 or 33%), college/academic department/units (33%), high-level administration (10 or 22%), university bookstores (9 or 20%), and student organizations (8 or 18%).

The majority of respondents (32 or 70%) indicated that their existing or planned campus initiative includes both affordable and openly licensed course content. Twelve (26%) are focused only on openly licensed content, and two (4%) reported focusing only on affordable course content.

Governance of Campus-Wide Initiatives

Fewer than 40% of respondents reported having a standing committee or limited-term task force/working group as their ACC/OER initiative governing structure. Many reported unofficial partnerships with one or more groups, oversight arrangements to get the work done, and informal collaborations. A few reported there is no governance structure at all.

Of the 35 respondents who identified which entities participate in or lead an ACC/OER governance body, the majority (31 or 89%) indicated that libraries are represented in the group. In addition to libraries, student organizations and teaching & learning groups were identified as active participants in around half of the governing bodies. Twenty-five percent of respondents indicated some representation from each of the following: high-level administration, college/academic department/unit, academic computing, instruction design group, university bookstore, faculty governance body, and the faculty development center. At three institutions the university press participates.

Half of the governing bodies are lead by the library, while at eight institutions high-level administration is the leader (29%). A representative of another group takes the lead at one or two institutions and in a few cases there is joint leadership.

Funding of Campus-Wide Initiatives

Library general operating budgets, external grants, or library special project funds were identified as the most frequent sources of funding for ACC/OER initiatives (51%, 28%, and 23% of responses, respectively). In some cases, institutional general operating budgets, academic department budgets, IT budgets, institutional special project funds, and endowment funds supplement library funding. Respondents who reported zero library funding for ACC/OER initiatives indicated that funds came from provincial or state government or legislature funds, the bookstore, external grants and gifts, grants from student groups, an IT department, academic departments, student fees, or consortium funding.

Funds predominantly cover faculty incentives or grant funds (29 responses, or 74%). Library and technical support staff are also frequently covered. Some respondents indicated that funds were used for

training faculty and library staff, funding student assistants, and purchasing multi-user e-textbooks or open textbook examination copies. Faculty course release and equipment were spending categories for fewer than 20% of respondents.

Approximately three-fourths of respondents reported there are funding continuation plans. The remaining respondents indicated that they have dedicated funding for a period of time and will need to refine their funding model and/or seek future financial support from campus senior administration. Others reported that future funding may be contingent on program evaluation, or that the status of continued funding is currently unknown. Some respondents indicated that core operating expenses would be self-funded and projects would be grant funded. Others are negotiating support from campus senior administration and other academic units. We suspect that continued funding goes hand in hand with formalization of special initiatives or pilot projects into regular services.

Faculty Incentive Programs

Anecdotal evidence suggested that faculty incentive programs have been an important and widely used early strategy for many libraries and institutions and the ACC/OER survey confirmed this conclusion. Three quarters of the responding libraries with activity in this area indicated their campuses provide an incentive program for faculty to adopt, adapt, or create affordable course content/open educational resources. A majority of the incentives offered (25 or 80%) were financial incentives (grants, stipends, etc.) or instructional design support (17 or 55%). Five programs use some funding for faculty course release as well. Several respondents also report they help faculty find and identify affordable/open content, connect faculty with additional support/services on campus (graphic design, academic technology, teaching and learning), and work with the Open Textbook Network to introduce faculty to open textbooks in their discipline and engage them via a review of a specific open textbook. Licensing, copyright, and publishing support are other areas noted here and later in library support services.

Details related to financial incentive grants indicate the amount and number awarded varies widely across institutions. Twelve institutions reported average grants of \$1250 or less with a total of approximately 288 awards. Two institutions reported larger incentive grants averaging ~\$3000 and \$4500 while still providing numerous awards (23 and 15, respectively). Three other institutions reported even more substantial awards of \$5000, \$10,000, and over \$15,000 but awarded fewer grants overall to date (1, 5, and 2, respectively).

The trend of offering more numerous, small incentive grants or fewer large grants was supported by the comments in this section of the survey as well. For example, one institution noted, “Three types of grants: \$12,000, three grants awarded; \$7,500, three grants awarded; \$1,000, nine grants awarded.” Respondents’ comments also indicate that several institutions have plans to implement an incentive program on their campus in the future, or extend or provide more awards at similar levels used in the past. Some incentive programs are intertwined with larger campus efforts that include ACC/OER content as one option among other teaching and learning transformations that qualifies for an award.

The requirements for faculty incentive grant programs, while numerous, are not universal across the responding institutions. By far, the requirements implemented at the most institutions are that faculty provide data about the course size and the cost of the existing textbook (17 responses, or 61%) and submit updates about their projects (14 or 50%). About a third of respondents indicated they also require faculty to apply an open license to newly created works, assess student learning, share content within their institution, use only openly licensed content, and report usage of ACC/OER for a number of years. A number of institutions indicated that they don’t “require” the items listed in the survey but obtain similar results through consultation with faculty as part of their incentive programs.

Institutional Policies and Practices

Survey responses indicate that current university-wide tenure and promotion policies do not explicitly encourage faculty adoption, adaptation, or creation of ACC/OER. However, faculty may list ACC/OER-related grants or awards on their CV and claim credit for digital works of scholarship. Several respondents noted that the attitude of academic departments varies, with some departments looking favorably on these efforts but not requiring or privileging creation of ACC/OER.

Whereas sharing beyond the institution is a priority, all but one of the responding institutions have an IP policy that specifies ownership and rights to original works. These policies are important for faculty members and other employees seeking to create and share OER beyond their institution. Most respondents (21 of 33) indicated that authors retain rights to their curriculum resources. Even more respondents indicated that ownership and rights of originally authored curriculum works are less than straightforward. Examples of complicating factors include: co-ownership by an author and department or author and institution, limitations on ownership due to use of “substantial university resources” or “additional support” received, author ownership unless a contract was signed, author ownership but institutional assertion of rights to use, and discretion over employee-created curriculum resources by departmental administrators. Two respondents listed the institution or university as the only entity holding ownership or rights. In response to a question on whether ACC/OER incentive programs require faculty participants to openly license original created works, 10 (36%) indicated that this is a requirement. (The survey did not ask how project policies requiring open licensing interacted with institutional policies.)

Current Faculty Practices

The survey asked what types of resources faculty have adopted, adapted, or created as part of the ACC/OER initiative. Not surprisingly, and perhaps reflecting existing faculty practice with traditional course content, faculty at the 30 responding institutions have most commonly created, adopted, or adapted textbooks (80%), readings or articles (70%), library licensed content (67%), and videos and websites (63% each). At the majority of responding institutions (23 or 77%) faculty have created open educational resources. At many institutions they have also created affordable content and have adopted or adapted ACC and OER content.

Seventeen respondents who actively support ACC/OER initiatives have also implemented some assessment measure to track the impact of their efforts on teaching and learning (41%). The metrics most frequently tracked are student savings (9 or 53%) and the number of students using OER (8 or 47%) or ACC (6 or 35%). The next tier of metrics focuses on tracking faculty behavior, including the number who are replacing course materials with OER (29%) or ACC (18%) or adapting or creating OER (18% each). Respondents’ comments on metrics used to evaluate the impact of the use of ACC/OER indicate some more complex methods, including examination of grade patterns prior to and after adoption of a more affordable option, number of student applicants influenced by OER usage, and various surveys focused on student satisfaction and perception of the ACC/OER materials. Nineteen other respondents (45%) plan to assess the impact of ACC/OER materials. Only six have no plans to assess their initiatives.

The library is the most likely candidate for conducting the assessment process, either now or in the future (11 responses, or 55%), followed distantly by teaching and learning, instructional design, and academic technology groups on campus (3 or 14% each). High-level administration is also interested in assessment measures in a few cases. The variety of entities reported as data gatherers in this area (including college/departments, bookstores, consortia, outreach, faculty development, and institutional research at several institutions) indicate the potential for broad interest and participation across campuses in ACC/OER work.

Only seven institutions reported sharing the results of their assessment efforts. A variety of methods have been used, including public websites, publications, conference presentations, presentations at faculty teaching events, and reports for senior administrators. The current assessment and reporting environment provides opportunities for more coordinated efforts both on and across various campuses to better demonstrate the benefits and impacts of ACC/OER.

ACC/OER Support Services and Educational Efforts

Forty-two respondents answered a question about the types of ACC/OER support activities their libraries provide or plan to provide. Forty answered a question their educational services for faculty. Many of the most implemented or planned for services and educational efforts are tied to existing library services or could be considered an expansion of traditional services. For example, the two support activities most commonly implemented or planned for in the future are copyright/open licensing consultation and reserves software and services (at over 90% of responding institutions). Searching and finding affordable content (83%), local repositories for openly licensed content (81%), educating users about affordable content topics or working with student advocacy groups (~70%) or purchasing additional course materials (60%) all might be considered extension or expansions of many existing library services as well. Activities that require a larger investment have not been implemented or planned for as widely, e.g., software systems for publishing openly licensed content (43%) or staff support for publishing the same (36%).

Educational services implemented or planned for reflect topics that closely align with the support activities mentioned above. Author's rights (100%), open licensing (90%), depositing open materials (88%), open publishing options (83%), and copyright contract negotiation (68%) are all covered at over three quarters of the responding institutions. Educational services focused on innovative pedagogy are much less likely to be covered (35%).

Faculty Engagement Strategies

Effective faculty engagement strategies focus primarily on training and outreach opportunities. Respondents indicated that training on ACC/OER has been provided as part of stand-alone training and programming and integrated into existing programming, notably copyright training and liaison services. Many respondents indicated that Open Education Week and Open Access Week have provided good opportunities for programming. Unique strategies include leveraging e-book licensing to share texts with faculty for course integration, targeted outreach to faculty who use course packs, and including OER in faculty development programs for courses transitioning to online delivery.

Library Staffing

Not surprisingly, there was some variation among responding institutions regarding library staff involvement with ACC/OER initiatives. The home department(s) within most libraries varies; however, some patterns emerged. The majority of the 41 respondents reported staff contributions to ACC/OER initiatives from scholarly communications (83%), library liaisons (73%), and public services/reference (54%). Teaching and learning departments at 20 institutions (49%) contribute to ACC/OER initiatives as well. In addition, several respondents indicated that the copyright office, library IT, and marketing also contribute staff to ACC/OER initiatives.

There was great variation among the 33 responding libraries with regard to the number of staff contributing to ACC/OER initiatives. Responses ranged from 1 to 25 staff, with a median of 6. The comments indicate that the higher number of staff involved reflect liaison or outreach programs in which ACC/OER are integrated in the full suite of services and partnership opportunities provided.

Of particular note is the range of positions that support ACC/OER initiatives at the responding libraries. Each respondent was asked to report the titles of up to five library staff who are involved. Forty

institutions reported a total of 164 positions. Only one reported a single staff member who supports ACC/OER initiatives and twenty listed titles for five positions. Associate/assistant university librarian (AUL) positions are involved in ACC/OER at a higher rate than anticipated. Of the 164 positions reported, 18 are AUL positions (11%). Many of the rest are department head positions or service/institute directors (35 or 21%). Across the positions reported, noteworthy titles include copyright officer/librarian, digital projects manager/librarian, e-learning librarian, and instructional technologist/designer. ACC/OER-specific titles include open education, copyright & scholarly communications librarian, and open educational resources coordinator.

Across the positions reported by each institution, the amount of time spent on ACC/OER does vary; however, ACC/OER is not a daily time commitment for most positions. The majority of positions (135 or 84%) spend “some time” each month, week, or day on ACC/OER. Only 26 (16%) spend significant time each week or day.

Library OER/ACC Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

The respondents were asked to indicate the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed in order to support ACC/OER initiatives and to select three that are the most important. The KSAs identified as most needed and most important by the 42 respondents are familiarity with the availability of ACC/OER resources (93%), intellectual property (90%), and familiarity with search strategies for ACC/OER resources (83%). Other KSAs needed at the majority of libraries include assessment (69%), familiarity with the learning management system (62%), and project management (60%).

Staff at the 40 responding libraries take advantage of multiple professional development opportunities to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities to support ACC/OER activities. Professional conferences (80%), in-person training/workshops (73%), virtual training/webinars (68%), and online discussion groups/professional communication (60%) are used at a majority of responding institutions.

Libraries and ACC/OER

The survey asked respondents to describe how they envision future library roles related to both ACC and OER. The most common themes closely align with current institutional or library program areas. This alignment provides credibility and stability that facilitates administrative and faculty buy in to support program longevity. Given libraries expertise in content (from copyright to tools and infrastructure), respondents see numerous opportunities for libraries to provide leadership on their campuses to support affordable and OER services and programs. Libraries frequently have strong ties with campus partners in administration, technology, and teaching and learning groups; ACC/OER efforts offer the chance to expand or build on these relationships. Many response emphasized the importance of libraries taking on a leadership role and on campus collaborations in this arena.

Advocacy, promotion, and awareness-raising educational efforts are key to helping faculty understand the array of course content options available to them and to work for change of culture and practice in the future. Helping interested faculty discover existing affordable content (whether it is library licensed or OER) and then providing easy access to that content (through reserves or support for implementing OER) are important service/support efforts that utilize a range of librarian and technology systems expertise and infrastructure support. Libraries also have the opportunity to advance the conversation regarding teaching and learning promotion criteria that support ACC/OER. Finally, publishing or hosting newly created open content, as well as providing needed copyright and licensing advice, are viewed as necessary future investments in many library spaces. Given the wide range of funding models, project types carried out (course reserves, publishing, authoring, copyright, open licensing support, etc.), the varying roles across campus partnerships, as well as libraries support

and educational services, provide pieces that other libraries can use to develop their own blueprint when ready to implement ACC/OER programs.

New state, national, and possibly global collaborative opportunities that are beginning to emerge in open textbook or OER publishing are worth highlighting as well. While library awareness and education efforts may be focused on a local campus, librarians could strategically recruit and incentivize the creation of new open content (to avoid the duplication of other highly regarded content already published) across institutions and across the globe to create the broadest possible impact.

Finally, developing sustainable models for funding ACC/OER initiatives and creating more robust assessment methods are two areas for growth in libraries. Many respondents indicated unclear or uncertain plans for future funding. Development of more standardized and robust assessment models could support proposals for permanent funding. While many institutions reported gathering data on cost savings, very few have tied metrics in course completion or student retention to ACC/OER efforts, factors that are important to institutional administrators. Other standard assessment measures would allow aggregation or comparison across institutions as well.

Based on the number of responding institutions, affordable course content and OER support within libraries continues to grow as an emerging area of interest. Nearly 60 ARL member institutions have or plan to have significant services and support available in the near future. We predict that this number will grow as faculty participation and interest increases. Libraries are uniquely poised to act as leaders, connectors, and content experts on their campuses to further a significant culture change related to course content selection and use.

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