
Capstone Final Report

OPEN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Enhancing OER Support by Developing a Workflow and Service Model

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Abstract

My capstone project for the 2018-19 SPARC Open Education Leadership Program focused on developing internal infrastructure in order to support a new and quickly growing OER program at the University of Houston (UH). The primary goals of my project were to develop an OER adoption workflow to support instructors in replacing commercial textbooks, and to develop a service model for an effective and sustainable level of OER support.

This report details the process of completing the capstone project, which included conducting an environmental scan of OER needs at UH, reviewing existing OER workflows and similar resources, developing an OER adoption workflow specific to the UH context, and beginning to develop a service model for OER support. Successful completion of the capstone project is evaluated by comparing project outcomes to the desired goals.

Lessons learned include recognizing the value of documentation, resisting perfection, understanding my own process, and acknowledging my progress and successes. This project would not be as successful without my SPARC mentor, Camille Thomas (Scholarly Publishing Librarian, Texas Tech University), who provided constant guidance and support.

Project Overview

In 2018, the University of Houston launched the Alternative Textbook Incentive Program (ATIP) in order to incentivize instructors to replace costly commercial textbooks with no-cost alternatives. ATIP saw a great deal of faculty interest from the start, and the need for OER support began to outpace the available capacity. Because of this, I focused my capstone project on developing resources to assist instructors in the OER adoption process and clarify the level of support available.

My capstone project goals were to:

- Develop adoption workflows in order to better support instructors in replacing traditional textbooks with open or alternative textbooks for fall 2019, and
- Articulate a service model in order to institutionalize OER services and deliver an effective and sustainable level of support for an enduring OER program

Multiple steps were involved in this project, including an environmental scan, reviewing existing resources, developing a workflow, and articulating an initial service model.

Environmental Scan

I felt it was important for an adoption workflow to address high-priority needs at my institution, so I started by conducting an environmental scan of OER needs at UH. I documented and analyzed OER-related inquiries, including inquiries received via email or phone, questions asked at OER events, and questions or discussion points from consultations with instructors. I gathered this information using a spreadsheet, documenting the following data points: name, format (email, in person, etc.), college, department, status (faculty, staff, student, etc.), and details of the inquiries or discussions.

I analyzed the data by sorting each inquiry into a topical category, resulting in the following categories: Adoption; Alternative Textbook Incentive Program; Copyright permissions; Creation or adaptation; Faculty motivation and needs; Finding OER or library resources; General or introductory information; Open licenses; and Open pedagogy. Although many of these topics overlap, I sorted each inquiry into one category so that I would end up with a useful representation of OER needs.

The most frequent topics of OER inquiries were creation or adaptation, Alternative Textbook Incentive Program, and copyright permissions, and distinct sub-topics emerged in some categories. For example, many inquiries about OER adoption were specifically about printing OER and how to distribute OER to students; and half of the inquiries about creation or adaptation were about technical formatting or platforms available for OER creation.

Conducting this environmental scan enabled me to develop a more thorough understanding of the OER needs at my institution and to share that information with my colleagues in the library. This information directly informed the OER adoption workflows I later created and will inform future training and developments in the UH OER program.

Review of Existing Workflows

Before creating a customized OER adoption workflow for UH, I researched and assessed existing workflows created for other institutions. I didn't know if a resource already existed that would meet my needs - if so, there would be no need for me to duplicate efforts by creating my own workflow from scratch. Assessing existing resources also helped me envision the type of resource I wanted to create and identify important qualities to incorporate.

I identified seven relevant resources and assessed each in terms of its "successes" and "challenges." I want to emphasize that I assessed them from the perspective of what would be useful for the needs of my institution; my intent is not to highlight perceived flaws or critique these resources outside of the context in which they are used. For example, in assessing the successes of a resource, I asked "what do I find useful about this? what can I draw from it to apply to a UH-specific workflow?" In assessing the challenges, I asked "what do I find not as useful about this? what would I change about it for the UH context?"

Based on my review of existing resources, I identified key qualities to incorporate into an OER adoption workflow for UH:

- Clear and user-friendly design
- Provides practical guidance and makes connections to goals and learning outcomes
- Comprehensive in scope, covering adoption, adaptation, and creation
- Addresses specific topics, including evaluating OER, use of non-OER affordable resources, determining license permissions, providing attribution, and disseminating OER
- Situated in the UH context and includes institution-specific information; for example, emphasizes support available through campus units
- Aligns with the UH Alternative Textbook Incentive Program yet is still applicable to uses of OER outside of the incentive program

Develop OER adoption workflow

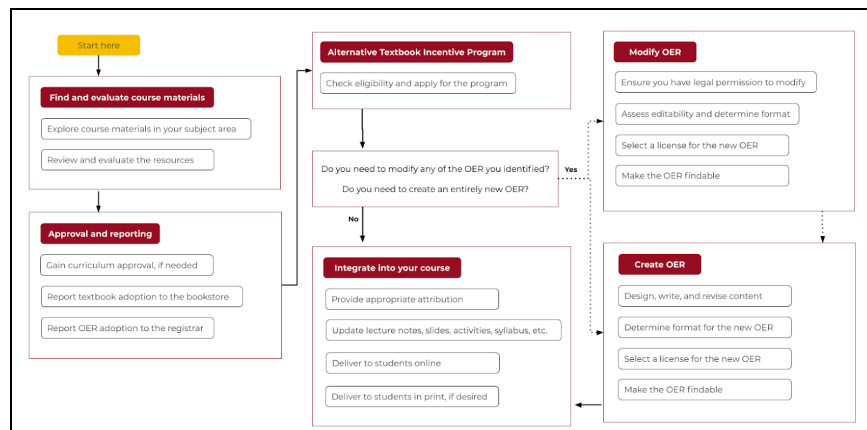
The process of developing the workflow was made much easier by completing the first two steps, which ensured I knew what specific information to include and gave me a clearer vision of what I wanted to create.

To develop the workflow, I first created a storyboard with sticky notes on a piece of paper (Figure 1). This allowed me to map out concepts and experiment with visual layout. I then moved into a text document to flesh out the details: for example, solidifying steps of the workflow, adding descriptions, and identifying appropriate resources to recommend. I then used one of the existing resources I identified ("[An OER Production Workflow for Faculty](#)" by Billy Meinke) as the starting point for an OER adoption workflow for the UH. Meinke's production workflow has many qualities I sought to include in my own workflow, so it made sense to adapt his CC-BY resource rather than start from scratch. It ended up serving as a foundation for the technical format, with nearly the entirety of the content changing. The end result includes a detailed workflow and a visual overview (Figure 2) created to support successful implementation of OER at UH.

Figure 1. Initial storyboard of OER adoption workflow.



Figure 2. Completed visual overview of OER adoption workflow.



Articulate a service model

For my second capstone goal – to articulate a service model in service of building a sustainable OER program – I began with the Alternative Textbook Incentive Program. The incentive program is currently the most concrete and developed aspect of the UH OER program. It is also still very new, and the support in place for the program is still evolving.

In planning to launch the second round of the incentive program, I articulated and made publicly available the support provided to award recipients by UH Libraries. In the first year of the program, expectations of award recipients were communicated, but the support provided to them was less clear and not publicly documented. Detailing the support provided to incentive program awardees required communicating with relevant units within the Libraries (e.g., institutional repository, metadata, copyright team) and thinking realistically about what we can and cannot say is offered at this time. This list is a solid starting point, and can be expanded to further articulate a service model for the OER program.

I began to expand on the support provided through the incentive program by incorporating aspects of a service model into the OER adoption workflow. This is very clear in some areas, for example, where it is stated that “UH Libraries currently provides limited support” in designing, writing, and revising the content for OER creation projects. Most steps in the workflow include contact information for further assistance, which reflects how the Libraries and institution handles different aspects of OER implementation. This involved communication with units external to the Libraries, particularly in areas that involve instructional designers, in order to come to a shared understanding of each others’ roles when it comes to OER support. This led to fruitful conversations and an enhanced understanding of how we can collaborate across the institution to support OER adoption.

Evaluation

I developed a rubric in collaboration with my SPARC mentor to be used to evaluate my portfolio. Below, I evaluate my project outcomes in comparison to the project goals as written in the rubric.

Capstone project goal: Identify priority OER needs on campus

As described in the Project Overview, I conducted a thorough environmental scan, through which I identified priority OER needs and gleaned meaningful information that applies to future work.

Capstone project goal: Communicate with campus stakeholders

I regularly communicated with library colleagues, particularly subject and functional specialists in the Liaison Services Department. I shared information in department meetings about ATIP and the environmental scan results, sought feedback from select colleagues on the workflow layout, and collaborated with liaison librarians on OER projects in their subject areas. My colleagues' questions, comments, and ideas inform my thinking about the OER program and have led to adjustments to ATIP and how I approach OER support.

I communicated with campus units external to the library with the goals of developing relationships, identifying workflows, and forming service models. I became an ex-officio member of the Bookstore Advisory Committee and attended regular meetings, initiated communication with the Office of the Registrar for purposes of reporting and assessment, had formal and informal meetings with instructional designers, and sought feedback on a draft of the OER workflow.

Capstone project goal: Develop adoption workflows

As described in the Project Overview, I created workflows that will assist in OER implementation. The documentation contains relevant, meaningful, and practical information. The process of creating the OER adoption workflow contributed greatly to my own knowledge and expertise, and the end product will be informative for instructors, library staff, and other campus units.

Capstone project goal: Articulate an OER service model

The outcome for this goal reached "satisfactory success" rather than "complete success." Some areas are developed (ATIP and OER adoption support) while others are not well-developed (adaptation and creation). Articulating a service model in a short amount of time is a highly ambitious goal, and the less-developed areas of the service model are those where we have less experience as a library and institution. However, there are opportunities to gain more experience in the coming months and test out various models of support, which places this goal on track to be completed within the year.

Lessons Learned

There is value in documentation.

Sometimes I doubted whether the outcomes of my project would be useful, and felt as though I was just producing more documents. My mentor assured me that there is value in documentation and the workflow I envisioned would certainly be useful - to myself, my local community, and the broader community. I learned that internal documentation is just as important as public documentation. A huge part of my project was simply documenting everything and learning from it. My extensive documentation provided a wealth of evidence to analyze and apply to future practices. For anyone not sure where to get started with a new program or service, I recommend documenting the current needs and using that as a starting point.

Don't wait for things to be perfect.

It's very tempting to want to figure things out perfectly before moving on to the next stage: I want to gather the information perfectly before analyzing it, analyze the information perfectly before applying it, and create a perfect workflow before implementing it. But that approach slows things down and hinders progress. In the words of my mentor, "You don't need documentation to engage in the services." I learned that it's okay to promote and engage with our OER program while still developing the specifics of it, and to be more comfortable with the fact that nothing will ever be perfect.

Understand your process.

My mentor and I had valuable conversations about my capstone project and beyond, however, we had difficulty communicating around one thing: the process I had in mind for how to approach the work of my project. To be clear, this was on me. I finally realized I was approaching my capstone from an instruction mindset, loosely using the ADDIE Model of instructional design (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate). This allowed me to more clearly explain my process, and to compare my approach to my mentor's user experience design approach. If I had come to this realization earlier, the whole process may have been more seamless. Understanding and being able to articulate my own process will continue to benefit to myself and others.

Any step forward is good progress.

My capstone was an ambitious project for a short timeframe, especially considering my existing responsibilities. I worried that I wouldn't meet my goals to the level desired, and again my mentor supported me with solid advice: focus on what you *are* doing, rather than feeling guilty about what you're not doing. When we set high standards for ourselves, it's natural to be disappointed by not reaching them and forget to acknowledge our successes. If you feel that way, know that there is value in the work you *are* doing, and that any step forward is good progress.

Community Resource

The outputs of my capstone project are shared as a community resource. The community resource documents, as well as this report, are available in this Google Drive folder:

[SPARC Capstone 2019 - Public Portfolio Documents](#)



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