1. What are Open Educational Resources (OERs)?

According to the Hewlett Foundation, “Open Educational Resources are teaching, learning and research materials in any medium – digital or otherwise – that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions” (2019). An OER can be a book, a courseware module, a video, or any other material. It may be print or online material.

The emphasis is on the concept of “openness” – the resources are available to be freely used, distributed, and possibly even remixed. In order to maintain their openness, OERs are typically licensed via Creative Commons licensing rather than via copyright. See Appendix 1 for a chart summarizing the different types of Creative Commons licenses available.

2. What are the benefits of OERs?

2.1 Low cost

Because of their open licensing, OERs are often free or represent only nominal costs to students, such as costs of printing. This means that more students have access to course materials. Studies have found that many students avoid purchasing textbooks when costs are high, and this can negatively impact their academic success and persistence (Colvard, Watson & Park, 2018 and Florida Virtual Campus, 2012 as cited in Martin, et al., 2017).

2.2 Easily adaptable

The licenses of many OERs permit adaptation or “remixing.” This lets instructors customize the resource to their class by adding, deleting, or modifying material. Instructors who involve students in the production or adaptation of OER materials may also be participating in “open pedagogy,” or “assignments that leverage OER to create more meaningful learning experiences” (Munro, Omassi & Yano, 2016).

2.3 Free knowledge sharing

The use of OERs also allows easy distribution of content beyond the walls of the classroom, making knowledge freely available to the broader community as well as the academic setting.

3. What are the drawbacks of OERs?

3.1 Availability of materials

Although many OERs are available for widely-taught, high-enrollment courses, pre-made materials for more unique courses may be difficult to find.

3.2 Time allocation

Locating, evaluating, and particularly creating open resources can be time consuming.

3.3 Not advertised / hard to find

Because OERs lack the advertising budget of traditional textbook publishers, faculty may have a more difficult time locating relevant materials for their classes. However, several repositories, referatories, and email listservs exist which can assist in finding the right materials. Libraries and librarians may also be a useful resource that can help in overcoming this barrier.

3.4 Quality varies

Some OERs are excellent quality and are even peer-reviewed; however, this is not the case for all OERs. As a result, OERs must be carefully evaluated prior to adoption.
3.5 Availability of ancillary materials
Some instructors rely heavily on ancillary materials that come packaged with textbooks from traditional publishers. These may include test banks, presentation materials, and workbooks. It can be more difficult and time-consuming to work with an OER if ancillary materials are not available and need to be created from scratch.

As more and more instructors adopt OERs, however, ancillary materials are becoming more common. Many instructors are willing to share materials they have created, thus furthering openness.

3.6 Sustainability
Because many content creators are not paid for their work on OERs, the materials may not be kept up to date as consistently as traditional textbooks. If online works are not hosted by a reliable institution, they may not be available for long-term use.

4. How can HCC support OER adoption and development?

4.1 Make OER use a strategic goal
Because OERs can impact student enrollment, success (Hilton, 2016; Feldstein, et al., 2012), course completion (Colvard, Watons & Park, 2018) and retention (Achieving the Dream, 2018), it makes sense to consider adding a campus-wide strategic goal regarding use of OERs across campus.

4.2 Encourage communication about OERs
Expressed institutional support for OERs is certainly a significant element in widespread adoption, but effective communication among faculty can also help raise awareness and enthusiasm. Presenting professional development opportunities focused on OERs and highlighting faculty who are working with OERs and open pedagogy can increase “buzz” about OERs.

Creating an OER working group can also help formalize channels of communication for and about OERs on campus.

4.3 Financially support OER creation or adaptation
Although OERs may be free or low-cost to students, production of Open Educational Resources is not free. Someone must do the labor to produce, review, adopt, or adapt open resources to be used in classrooms. The college can help support this labor by offering grants, stipends, and/or release time to faculty involved in OER initiatives. The INTRO Model for sustainability indicates that increased enrollment can help cover these costs (Wiley, Williams, DeMarte & Hilton, 2016). Grants from outside organizations are also available in some cases.

4.4 Promote student choice
Some institutions indicate in their course catalog and/or schedule which classes offer the use of OER materials to reduce textbook costs. This information can be a selling point to students.

5. How can I use OERs in my classroom?
University of Arkansas Libraries (2018) identify three ways faculty can become involved with Open Educational Resources: they can adopt already created OERs, create their own OERs, or adapt existing OER materials to fit their course. In addition, instructors can take OERs one step further by engaging in open pedagogy.
5.1 Adopt

5.1A Find
The first step to adopting OERs is to find open resources in the relevant subject area. Faculty may conduct searches of repositories and referatories themselves (see the Hagerstown Community College Library OER LibGuide at https://hagerstowncc.libguides.com/oer/home for a list of the most up-to-date resources). Librarians are also available to assist in the search.

5.1B Evaluate
Once relevant OERs have been located, the next step is to carefully evaluate them. Achieve, Inc. (2011) recommends evaluating OER objects using the following criteria. A detailed rubric for each criterion is available at their website.

- Degree of alignment to standards
- Quality of explanation of the subject matter
- Utility of materials designed to support teaching
- Quality of assessment
- Quality of technological interactivity
- Quality of instructional and practice exercises
- Opportunities for deeper learning
- Assurance of accessibility

Additional rubrics are available on the HCC OER LibGuide, or instructors may wish to create a custom rubric including the most significant aspects for their class(es). As always, accessibility for students with disabilities should play an important role in the evaluation process.

5.1C Adopt
Instructors should be sure to go through the proper administrative processes to adopt open materials for their classes, including consulting with the lead faculty member for each course. This process may include departmental and/or division approval.

In many cases, helping students access OER materials is as simple as providing them with a link to an online resource. The Campus Store and/or Digital Printing may also be able to provide options for students who wish to purchase hard copies of textbook resources.

5.2 Create
If excellent resources are not readily available, instructors may wish to create their own materials from scratch. This could be as simple as creating a test to accompany an existing resource or as complex as writing a textbook from the ground up. Many excellent resources exist to guide faculty in this process. See the HCC LibGuide on OERs for more information.

Instructors at Hagerstown Community College who wish to sell their self-published materials in the Campus Store must follow the Digital Printing Self-Publishing Guidelines available at http://www.hagerstowncc.edu/design-services/self-publishing

When deciding how to license self-created content, authors should consider using Creative Commons licensing (http://www.creativecommons.org). Creative Commons provides a range of licenses from freely available with no attribution required to more restrictive licenses specifying that the author must be credited, derivatives of the work must also be shared freely, and that the work may not be used for
commercial purposes. Librarians are available to help with this decision-making process as well. All self-authored works should clearly specify the type of license.

5.3 Adapt
Sometimes relevant content is available, but it does not quite meet the excellence criteria for a given class. In this case, instructors may wish to adapt the material for their own use. Before beginning an adaptation project, faculty should be sure to verify that the license under which the work is released permits such activity.

Once the license is verified, instructors can add material, delete irrelevant sections, or make changes to improve content. Sometimes two or more existing resources can also be “remixed” to form a better product.

The license for the final product may be governed by the license of the original works. Credit should always be given to the original contributors whenever possible.

5.4 Implement open pedagogy
Involving students in the production or adaptation of openly licensed materials is known as “open pedagogy” (Munro, Omassi & Yano, 2016). An example of open pedagogy on the HCC campus is the National Endowment for the Humanities grant project “Bridging the Antietam” organized by Alicia Drumgoole, Kate Benchoff, and Lore Kuehnert. This project involves students in collecting, compiling, and publishing local history.

Other examples of open pedagogy could include having students review materials prepared for an OER or openly license their own videos or pamphlets created as class projects (Munro, Omassi & Yano, 2016).
References


## Appendix 1

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