Building a Community of Inquiry Around OER

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Abstract

This article discusses the pedagogical framework used by librarians who are developing and leading the training component of a new grant program for faculty interested in converting existing course materials to open educational resources (OER). The authors detail how librarians built a Community of Inquiry (CoI) surrounding OER to foster campus collaborations and demonstrate the value of OER by participating in efforts to develop grant guidelines, review proposals, and provide training and support for faculty grant recipients. Librarians designed an asynchronous OER training course for faculty in the campus learning management system.
(LMS), using existing open source materials. The course applies the CoI model of teaching and learning—through teaching, social, and cognitive presence. Through the course, librarians worked with faculty from a variety of disciplines to integrate affordable learning resources in their courses. The article includes some reflections from faculty and lessons learned thus far, along with resources used in the OER grant program.

**Keywords:** Community of Inquiry, faculty-librarian relationships, faculty development, OER grant program, learning management system

**Introduction**

When the College of Charleston (CofC), a large public master’s college in Charleston, South Carolina, initiated a grant program for faculty interested in converting their course materials to open educational resources (OER) during the 2018-2019 academic year, the College Libraries became an epicenter for OER support on campus. Librarians were already utilizing and learning about OER from the ground up—long before the grant program was announced, research and instruction librarians were using OER textbooks in their own credit-bearing information literacy classes. Library staff had also attended conference sessions and training on affordable learning initiatives, developed an extensive online OER guide, and formed a working group in partnership with instructional technologists from CofC’s Teaching and Learning Team. Due to this existing knowledge and expertise, librarians consulted on and participated in every step of the grant program. They helped develop grant guidelines, reviewed proposals, and led training and support for faculty grant recipients. This article will focus on how research and instruction librarians at CofC designed an asynchronous OER training course for faculty in the
campus learning management system (LMS)—using existing open source materials—and subsequently worked with faculty from a variety of disciplines to integrate affordable learning resources in their courses. Through their leadership with the grant program, librarians sought to foster a Community of Inquiry (CoI) surrounding OER on campus. The CoI model of teaching and learning identifies three essential elements for learning (teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence), and specifically applies them to online learning environments (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). The course created by librarians at CofC applies these three elements in the following ways:

- **Teaching Presence**: The course adapts Creative Commons (CC) licensed OER development training from the State University of New York (SUNY). By using OER materials as the basis for our curriculum, faculty were provided with a model for how they can adapt OER and share resources. Many faculty members are concerned that using OER will mean added work and less time—this example shows how reusing materials developed and appropriately licensed can be timesaving and efficient.

- **Social Presence**: The course uses online education best practices to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing, including member introductions, discussions, and organizing faculty and librarians into team groups. This encourages faculty to learn from and support each other in an environment that is familiar and lasting.

- **Cognitive Presence**: Faculty members apply what they are learning into their OER course design. Grant projects can be loosely grouped into two categories: selecting and adapting existing materials and developing and formatting material newly created by the instructor. Within these two categories, however, projects vary greatly, from adding homework exercises in Mathematical Markup Language to a vector calculus textbook
written by math department colleagues, to searching for openly licensed Russian 
language resources. Considerations such as accessible design are reflected across all 
projects.

**Literature Review**

**Libraries and OER.** Advocacy for OER amongst librarians is not a new or especially 
innovative topic, although it is widely discussed in current professional literature within the 
context of affordable learning in K-20 education and, occasionally, in connection to critical 
librarianship and engaged pedagogy (Crissinger, 2015; Wilkinson, 2017). In the recent past, “one 
of the greatest challenges” in supporting faculty interest in OER adoption was finding, 
evaluating, and using materials with appropriate licenses to use in courses (Massis, 2016, p. 
770). Thankfully, the seemingly barren landscape has bloomed with the help of dedicated 
institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations to create both open courseware and 
highly searchable OER repositories—e.g., OpenStax from Rice University, Open Textbook 
Library from the Open Textbook Network and the University of Minnesota, GeorgiA Li-brary 
LEarning Online (GALILEO) from Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) and the University 
System of Georgia, Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching, 
commonly known as MERLOT, from the California State University System, OER Commons 
powered by the independent education nonprofit Study of Knowledge Management in Education 
(ISKME), and many, many more. In addition, the willingness of statewide academic library 
consortia—e.g., the aforementioned ALG, Louisiana Library Network (LOUIS), Ohio Library 
and Information Network (OhioLINK), Open Oregon, and Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA)—
international consortia like Community College Consortium for Open Educational Resources 
(CCCOER), and system-wide OER initiatives, like the one at SUNY, to support academic
librarians, faculty, and instructional designers and technologists as they explore OER, for both the sake of “saving students money” and “an overall improvement in students’ academic performance” (McBride, 2019, p. 24), has not gone unnoticed in the literature (Bell & Salem, 2017; Colson, Scott, & Donaldson, 2017; Evans, 2018; Evans, 2019; Salem, 2017).

While conversations regarding copyright law, fair use, and intellectual property—and the introduction of CC licenses over a decade ago—have placed libraries and the work of librarians “at the crux of affordable learning,” OER curation, promotion, and even publication have also become “an integral part of an academic library’s service model” (Evans, 2019, p. 1) as college and university tuition costs continue to rise and more students are reported to be food and/or housing insecure (Blagg, Whitmore-Schanzenbach, Gundersen, & Ziliak, 2017; Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2018). The process of converting to OER can be time-intensive, however, and buy-in is not likely to materialize based on the cause of affordable learning alone (Cummings, 2019). Beyond “practical reasons” (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 117) for library involvement in OER adoption and delivery, librarians are also pedagogically inclined, through digital and information literacy instruction, “to demonstrate how authority is a means to disseminate power, not withhold it” (p. 118). As an alternative to traditional models that favor “the university bookstore’s treatment of knowledge as capital” (Wilkinson, 2017, p. 115), OER empowers both faculty and students to fully engage with course content in meaningful ways and allows faculty to make deliberate choices when selecting and adapting or developing and formatting materials. It seems as though librarians are uniquely poised to discuss the “pedagogical superiority” of open education (Cummings, 2019, p. 25) and develop and deliver campus-wide professional development on “the potential of digital technologies and specifically the need for new digital literacies” (Conole, 2018); their expertise and willingness to
lead is well-recognized in the literature covering the practical application of OER grant and incentive programs (Bell & Johnson, 2019; Bell & Salem, 2017; Goodsett, Loomis, & Miles, 2016; Jensen & Nackerud, 2016; Walz, Jensen, & Salem, 2016).

**Librarians and the Community of Inquiry model.** Almost 20 years ago, the CoI framework was first introduced as a model of teaching and learning, specifically for delivering courses “anytime, anywhere” and for facilitating educational transactions through “computer-mediated communication” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 87). Despite increasing enrollment in online and distance education programs in the United States (Seaman, Allen, & Seaman, 2018), experimentation with “authentic tasks and active learning techniques” (Finch & Jefferson, 2013, p. 181) in blended and online learning environments is still widely discussed in the literature, and students reportedly “bemoan the fact that they do not have the personal connection they desire when learning online” (Rapchak, 2017, p. 59). Courses and training delivered by librarians, however “multi-task, multi-purpose, multi-disciplinary” (Finch & Jefferson, 2013, p. 182) they are designed to be, can be also be disappointing to students and participants if they lack the collaborative approach and “facilitative nature” (p. 187) of the CoI model, which identifies teaching, social, and cognitive presence (see Figure 1) as overlapping elements in “a successful higher educational experience” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 87).
Methodology

While interest in open education already existed in pockets around campus, advocacy for OER came only after it became obvious that both library staff and academic administration—i.e., the Provost—were in a position to foster a CoI around OER. A handful of individual faculty were using OER in their courses, but a formal network of support was lacking until an interdepartmental working group of library staff began meeting to discuss and develop a campus-wide strategy. The group formed out of professional interests and personal experience. Several librarians at CofC teach a credit-bearing information literacy course, and most had reused content from an open textbook from SUNY Open in their course—i.e., The Information Literacy User’s Guide: An Open, Online Textbook (Bernard et al., 2014)—and/or one published by the
Ohio State University—i.e., *Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research* (Lowery, 2016). Additionally, two of these faculty librarians had written and published lesson plans for the course under a CC license (Finch & van Arnhem, 2018; van Arnhem & Finch, 2018). Several members of the group had also attended consortial trainings and conference sessions related to campus affordable learning initiatives. Shortly before the group began meeting, the research and instruction librarians created an OER LibGuide (CofC, 2018) and began putting out feelers on campus for other partners, including instructional designers and technologists from CofC’s Teaching and Learning Team. At the same time, the Provost developed an interest in OER because of its frequent coverage in academic and higher education literature and tasked a faculty member with researching and developing a proposal for a grant program to incentivize and reward faculty for transitioning their courses to OER. The appointed faculty member met with two members of the library working group, and librarians were subsequently involved in all aspects of the program. In particular, it was decided that the library would be the primary source of support for faculty receiving grants. This support would include a formal training component and ongoing assistance and guidance, as needed, from an assigned library liaison. The program was announced at a meeting of the Faculty Senate (see Figure 2), and any and all faculty members were invited to apply for $750 grants to transition a course to OER, while librarians offering support to these faculty members, ultimately, received smaller stipends of $200 each for their efforts. A total of 10 faculty members applied to the program, representing eight OER projects—two of the projects were collaborative, involving courses taught by multiple instructors. Once the faculty applications were reviewed and accepted by a small committee of two faculty members, one librarian, and one instructional technologist, librarians could begin preparing a training course that would foster a CoI surrounding OER.
CofC Faculty Incentive OER Grants

- Implementation allocation - $750
- Call for applications - late November 2018
- Selection Committee - Faculty and Library Staff
- Requirements and timeline:
  - Commit to teaching grant-supported course at least twice using OER
  - Work with library liaisons to identify OER for courses (spring 2018)
  - Teach high-impact courses with OER (fall 2019)
  - Submit report assessing OER use in their course (spring 2020)

Figure 2. Slide from Faculty Senate Provost’s Report (November 13, 2018): Open Educational Resources (OER).

Developing the OER training course. Many faculty members at CofC have participated in a program called Distance Education (DE) Readiness, designed to prepare faculty for teaching in an online environment. DE Readiness completion is required before instructors can teach online at CofC (CofC, 2017). The program is an asynchronous online course administered in the campus LMS (Brightspace/D2L) and administered and taught by an instructional technologist. Other faculty members, past DE Readiness graduates, serve as mentors and leaders of small groups. All research and instruction librarians at CofC have taken DE Readiness in preparation for teaching online credit-bearing information literacy courses, and one librarian has served as a DE mentor. Because of faculty familiarity with this program, and because in-person training
posed scheduling challenges, DE Readiness was chosen as a model for an online OER training program for OER grant recipients. Three librarians—the authors of this article—volunteered to build, collaboratively, an OER training course based on DE Readiness and deliver it entirely on the campus LMS with support from our CofC’s instructional technologists, who regularly manage the DE Readiness program.

Rather than develop new materials from scratch, the group decided to use existing, open resources on OER. Numerous resources have been created to foster faculty understanding of OER, but the OER Community Course created by SUNY was selected as the model for our course (SUNY, 2018). As previously mentioned, SUNY OER Services is one of the largest and most robust statewide OER initiatives in the United States. SUNY has developed extensive training modules covering different aspects of open education and shared them online, and the course was designed in ways that paralleled what CofC librarians were discussing for their program, including content that was separated into manageable chunks, a discussion space for faculty to communicate simultaneously with librarians and with each other, and a badging program for faculty who completed the modules and corresponding activities. Certain aspects of the program, such as discussion boards and cohort groups, are limited to SUNY faculty and staff, but the course content is freely available on the web for anyone’s use. SUNY staff members were generous in answering questions and even shared a folder containing text and image files used in the online course. Following independent reviews of the SUNY content, the authors of this article used the files to create four content modules in the LMS course: Defining OER; Identifying, Finding and Adopting OER; Customizing and Integrating OER; and Creating, Licensing, and Publishing OER. These four topics best captured the essential knowledge necessary for faculty to develop a thorough understanding of OER, use it effectively in their
course, and become an advocate for OER on campus. Additional topics were considered, but it was decided that faculty needed to acquire the basics and then shift their focus to their individual courses, rather than work through additional, general content about OER.

Identifying, finding, and adapting OER about OER was a strategic curriculum design choice. Reusing SUNY’s open content dramatically reduced the time and effort involved in developing the training program. Developing a new course is time-intensive, and many institutions, especially those without a dedicated OER or scholarly communications librarian, may find it challenging, initially, to implement such a program from scratch. This parallels the concerns of many instructors that designing or redesigning a course using OER is impractical (Cummings, 2019). This course not only provided faculty with an example of OER in action, it also demonstrated that using OER, and open education itself, can save time, add quality, and potentially improve the “educational experience” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 87) of both instructors and students or participants. As previously mentioned, the CoI framework identifies the overlap or “convergence” of teaching, social, and cognitive presence as ideal in creating “a collaborative constructivist education experience” (Vaughan, Garrison, & Cleveland-Innes, 2013, p. 11), and the OER training course developed and delivered by librarians was designed with this in mind.
Figure 3. Educational experience in the OER training course.
First, by using the SUNY course content as a backbone, librarians demonstrated to faculty how OER can be used to create a strong teaching presence in an online course (see Figure 4). The course began with a Welcome and Overview module that introduced the course with a quick syllabus and a welcome video that outlined expectations for the course and explained how the course would incorporate materials created and CC-licensed by SUNY into the informational part of the course. This first module also contained a discussion board for introductions in
addition to a pre-course survey (see Appendices A and B), designed to gauge participants’
familiarity and/or comfort level with the topics covered in the course. Following the Welcome
and Overview module were four content modules based on SUNY’s course. The SUNY content
selected for inclusion was lightly edited to be more institution-specific, renamed, and reformatted
as native HTML documents in the LMS (see Figure 5), offering a seamless, cohesive experience
to someone working their way through the course materials. While SUNY materials incorporate
a variety of sources and embedded content, such as videos and podcasts, the overall course has a
consistent style and voice that would be more difficult to achieve if the course simply linked to
SUNY’s website.
A wrap-up module was planned (see Figure 6), but it was not released to participants due to a compressed timetable for the first round of grant recipients. OER training for the first cohort occurred during the second half of the Spring 2019 semester and was complicated by the final exam schedule and summer break when faculty are off-contract. Faculty members continued to work on their course materials during the summer months with the assistance of librarians and were asked to complete their OER projects by the start of the Fall 2019 semester. Due to complications of releasing training mid-semester at a busy time for faculty, subsequent changes and additions to the training course are expected for the second round of grants, along with an extended timeframe for recipients to complete content modules and other activities. Faculty
members from the first cohort will be asked to share their experiences with new cohort members in order to expand discourse and offer peer support. All these efforts should help to increase the teaching presence in the online OER training course.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module 1: Welcome and Overview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 2: Defining OER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 3: Identifying, Finding, and Adopting OER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 4: Customizing and Integrating OER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 5: Creating, Licensing, and Publishing OER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 6: Wrap Up, Next Steps, and Additional Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.** OER training course table of contents.
Secondly, in designing the course, the librarians sought not only to support faculty’s individual projects through open discussion in the LMS but also to strengthen current knowledge and future advocacy of OER on campus (see Figure 7). While some components borrowed from SUNY touched on building this campus network, creating a strong social presence in the course was a more effective way of accomplishing “Emotional Expression,” “Open Communication,” and “Group Cohesion” (Garrison et al., 2000). A standard Introductions discussion board was included in the first module and participants were asked to introduce themselves and explain their projects (see Figure 8). This led to some of the most fruitful interactions of the course, with
faculty offering suggestions to each other and recognizing points of overlap. After introductions were made, the librarians teaching the course reviewed the projects and assigned each participant to a small group. These groups were loosely based on the librarians’ subject liaison areas, although not all subject areas were represented by the three librarians leading the course. Separate Group Discussions were set up for each group (see Figure 9), although this proved to be unnecessary—the list of participants was short enough that the main discussion board proved to be a more effective way to collaborate than private discussions with only three to four people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Threads</th>
<th>Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introductions: Who are you? What is your project?</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use this topic board to introduce yourself. Tell us who you are (personally and academically), and describe your OER project. Feel free to also share any anxieties, concerns, or special interests you have going into the course. We will use your interests to assign cohort groups and library mentors for the rest of the program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **General Discussion and Questions** | 6       | 20    |
| Use this topic board for open discussion of OER concepts and to ask (and answer) questions regarding course content, technology issues, etc. We will be using this board to contextualize each module throughout the course, so please make your thread titles as descriptive as possible. |          |       |

Figure 8. OER training course course lounge.
Hello and welcome to the "Amanda's Group" discussion board! Our group is made up of the following folks, all of which are in the School of Business (please be sure to read about individual projects in the main discussion board):

- 
- 
- 

In this group you will communicate with me (your library mentor) and other group members about your specific projects to gather advice, resources, and more!

I can’t wait to get started. Please share end of module discussions, concerns, and ideas that will be relevant to everyone in the main discussion board.

Best wishes,
Amanda

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**Figure 9. OER training course group discussions.**

From the library’s point of view, the social aspects of the course were the most successful. Building partnerships with campus stakeholders, including teaching faculty, is an important component of successful OER initiatives (Salem, 2017), but early efforts by the library to gauge faculty interest in and usage of OER on campus were not especially fruitful. By cultivating relationships with grant recipients, especially through mentor groups that assigned faculty to one specific librarian, the library now has strong OER connections in many departments on campus. Plans are being discussed to host one or more events in the library in the future, where participating faculty can discuss and showcase their projects with other faculty on campus. Librarians teaching the course—the authors—have presented at local conferences alongside one of the grant recipients (Kraft, O’Byrne, Scronce, & van Arnhem, 2019) and have solicited feedback on the program from all current grant recipients in an effort to provide an opportunity for faculty to share their own experiences. The authors plan to continue to
collaborate with grant recipients in the future on additional presentations, assessments, and scholarly writing, as they continue to learn more about OER resources and use or create them for their courses.

Cognitive presence.

**Figure 10. Cognitive presence in the OER training course.**

Finally, the third element of the CoI model of learning, cognitive presence, is closely related to “Exploration,” “Integration,” and “Resolution” (Garrison et al., 2000)—i.e., critical thinking. Because the course did not incorporate traditional assignments or assessments, cognitive presence is more difficult to identify than teaching and social presence. However, in many ways, supporting faculty as they make connections and facilitating the exchange of information were the primary goals of the entire course. Much of this cognitive work takes place individually, as faculty incorporate what they have learned from course materials and each other into selecting,
developing, and formatting materials for their own courses (see Figure 10). This work will continue into the Fall 2019 semester as faculty teach their courses with OER, most for the first time, and they will have continuous access to the OER training course and the News/Announcements feed on its homepage (see Figure 11). The OER training course uses online education best practices to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing, including member introductions, discussions, and organizing faculty and librarians into team groups. This encourages faculty to learn from and support each other in an environment that is familiar and lasting. In the librarians’ conversations and email exchanges with faculty over the Spring and Summer 2019 semesters, faculty have exhibited indicators of cognitive presence, including asking questions, exploring different solutions, and applying new methods, ideas, and materials into their courses.
Findings and Results

Most OER grant courses are currently being taught for the first time or are scheduled to be taught in future semesters, so a full analysis of the first grant cycle is still pending. Formal assessment and evaluation will occur once the first year concludes in Spring 2020 and will include a complete comparison of program costs and savings, qualitative analysis of final reports submitted by participating faculty, and possibly comparative analysis of student performance and grades.
The librarians have collected some reflections from faculty and lessons learned thus far, including the importance of timing the course to maximize faculty engagement. They also compiled an estimated cost-savings analysis based on enrollment numbers in August 2019. For the initial grant cycle, the estimated amount spent on grants was $8,500.00 (including stipends for 10 faculty participants and four librarians). In comparison, an early estimate of previous textbook costs for five of the courses being taught with OER in Fall 2019 showed almost $14,000 saved in student textbook costs (remaining grant courses have yet to be taught or estimated material costs were unavailable) (see Table 1). This indicates the total financial impact for students will far outweigh the cost of awarding grants.

### Table 1. Estimated Textbook Savings For Students - Fall 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department and Course</th>
<th>Cost of Comparable Textbook</th>
<th>Fall 2019 Enrollment (as of 7/29/19)</th>
<th>Estimated Savings per Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics: Vector Calculus with Chemical Applications</td>
<td>$195.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$1,560.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management &amp; Marketing: Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</td>
<td>$86.25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>$2,587.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management &amp; Marketing:</td>
<td>$176.00</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$4,048.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality and Tourism Management: Hospitality and Tourism Technology</td>
<td>$115.00</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>$3,335.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s and Gender Studies: Intro to Women’s and Gender Studies</td>
<td>$67.45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>$2,360.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Estimated Savings:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$13,891.25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Interpretations and Recommendations

One obvious drawback to an LMS course is its lack of openness. All parts of the course are CC licensed, but in practice, it is difficult to share materials from within an LMS.

Participating librarians felt the benefits of modeling OER using a tool that is ready-made and familiar to most faculty, along with the ability of the LMS to provide a controlled discussion space that fosters trust and community, outweighed the inability to share. Still, placing open content in a restricted environment is a drawback. One faculty member’s OER project is to
transition materials from the LMS to an open website, and the librarians are eager to learn from this project and consider how the course could be held on an open platform in the future.

Timing should be an important consideration for future cycles of this grant program and for any similar initiatives. The initial grant program was conceived of and planned during the Fall 2018 semester and launched in early 2019. By the time applications were received and evaluated and training was ready, it was already spring break. The second half of the spring semester proved to be an extremely busy time for faculty. Furthermore, because the grant program was new and initial information about the program had been somewhat vague, they were not prepared for a time-intensive training course. Most participated in the initial discussion board with excitement and a willingness to engage with each other’s questions, but involvement quickly tapered off as end-of-year pressures escalated. None of the faculty completed the entire LMS course in the recommended timeframe, although several returned to the content once the semester ended and they had more time to devote. Because faculty had not completed the initial modules, a planned, final wrap-up module containing an OER review activity was never released and assigned, and the semester ended without a formal ending for this course.

The grant timeline and application materials have been refined for the second round of OER grants, to be awarded in December 2019 following an application period in the fall. The course will officially run during the Spring 2020 semester, but participating faculty will have an opportunity to begin the course during winter break if they wish, and all faculty will begin the semester with an understanding of course expectations and the time commitment involved. The award has increased from $750 per faculty member to $1000.

CofC’s second grant cohort will be expected to teach their course for the first time during the 2020-2021 academic year. This reflects an expansion of the timeframe for implementing an
OER course. Faculty in the initial Spring 2019 grant cohort were expected to teach their revised course in Fall 2019, but this proved unrealistic for some instructors and projects. One notable problem is that many courses are not scheduled to be taught every fall semester. Other faculty members were asked to rearrange their course load and take on additional new course preparation during the scheduled implementation time, requiring them to push out the delivery of their OER course into a future semester. Another setback encountered was the lack of suitable OER resources for specific disciplines/goals. For example, one project proposal involved seeking OER materials for a 200-level language course. Participants were unable to locate suitable resources for this course, but they did identify OER materials ideal for their 100-level course. They did not have time to rework their 100-level course for Fall 2019, but they anticipate amending their proposal and teaching with OER in a future term. Based on these experiences, it is realistic to incorporate a one-year course implementation period for OER course revisions, beginning after faculty members have completed training.

Changes were made to the grant application in Fall 2019 to more specifically identify and reward the types of projects expected to have the highest impact. The new application clarifies the priority of the grant to fund faculty adoption of OER materials in course sections offered on a recurring basis for first-, second-, and third-year students. It now excludes applicants who teach courses that currently utilize OER or have little or no materials costs to students unless the course is substantially revised during the award period (CofC, 2019).

Conclusions

Overall, faculty perceptions of the OER grant program initiative have been positive. Faculty stated that they found the program to provide an opportunity to reduce costs for students, add flexibility in course design by using open-access digital materials, and provide instructors
with the opportunity to utilize current content not generally available in printed textbooks. Instructors found this particularly germane in technology-focused classes. Some instructors were overwhelmed by the number of resources available for their discipline but stated that working with a librarian on their specific learning goals and sharing resources with others was a valuable part of the experience. Grant recipients reported that they found the grant program useful and indicated that it encouraged them to take a new approach to their course design. 

In particular, the CoI model appears to be a useful approach for a faculty development program. By considering each element—teaching, social, and cognitive presence—librarians facilitated a full educational experience for faculty, who in turn are better equipped to facilitate the same for their students. There are early indications that the OER grant program has impacted educational experiences at the classroom level. For example, one participant teaching a Women’s and Gender Studies course was motivated to apply for a grant because she wanted to reduce the cost burden for her students. In an October 2019 interview shared on CofC’s private social media site for faculty and staff (Rose, 2019), she shared that she initially felt intimidated by some of the technical terms and technology being discussed by other participants in the course. Once she completed the course and began experimenting with her course redesign, however, she found herself incorporating more and more non-traditional resources and technology components, such as blogs and videos. She even created a website to contain her syllabus and all class readings, making her course content fully open for anyone to find. As a result, she has noticed an increase in student engagement, and the response from students has been so positive that she is planning to stop using traditional textbooks in all her classes.

This project illustrates how a library-led training program can be a meaningful component of a successful campus OER initiative. As the community of OER adopters and
advocates on campus continues to grow, it is hoped that faculty grant recipients, along with librarians and ultimately even students, can share their experiences with open education in a spirit that fosters a CoI surrounding OER on campus.

References


Rose, K. (October 24, 2019). How adding OER to your courses can change your teaching in a positive way [Blog post]. Retrieved from College of Charleston Yammer.


Appendix A

OER Pre-Course Survey (Form)

OER Pre-Course Survey

This is a self-assessment of your abilities upon entering the course.

* Required

Last name: *

Your answer

First name: *

Your answer

Defining OER

Rate your ability to define OER. *

1 2 3 4 5

Poor

Excellent

Comments (explaining your rating):

Your answer
Appendix B

OER Pre-Course Survey (Responses)

Defining OER

Rate your ability to define OER. *

1 2 3 4 5

Poor □ □ □ □ □ Excellent

Comments (explaining your rating):
Your answer

Identifying, Finding, and Adopting OER

Rate your ability to identify, find, and adopt OER. *

1 2 3 4 5

Poor □ □ □ □ □ Excellent

Comments (explaining your rating):
Your answer

Customizing and Integrating OER

Rate your ability to customize and integrate OER. *

1 2 3 4 5

Poor □ □ □ □ □ Excellent

Comments (explaining your rating):
Your answer
Creating, Licensing, and Publishing OER

Rate your ability to create, license, and publish OER. *

1 2 3 4 5

Poor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Excellent

Comments (explaining your rating):

Your answer

What kind of support do you need most for transitioning your course? Select all that apply. *

☐ Finding and evaluating a textbook
☐ Customizing a textbook for my course
☐ Technical help with integrating OER in my course
☐ Developing and licensing my own OER
☐ Finding or creating replacements for homework, quizzes, etc. that came with my traditional text

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