Perceptions and Practice of Openness Among Academic Librarians

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Abstract

Librarians from a multi-institution, public higher education system were invited to participate in an online survey to assess their current practices in support of open access (OA) activities and their attitudes and behaviors related to the use of open educational resources (OER). This descriptive, small-sample survey was conducted after the first year of a multi-million dollar infusion in state funding to “move the dial” in textbook affordability using OER. The results provide insight into librarians’ perceptions of the support for, adoption of, and usefulness of open activities. Open-ended qualitative responses related to the sustainability of an OER program complement and provide additional narrative for discussion. Findings indicate that after the first year of increased support, some librarians are deeply involved in OER activities, while the majority are still in the early stages of learning about OER and are not yet comfortable with offering OER assistance to others. Based on the survey results, a number of innovative ways that librarians are infusing components of openness into their work are described. Suggestions identified relate to additional recognition and rewards for instructors and librarians, training and
education, and administrative, staffing, and financial support. The developmental life-cycle for implementing change and measuring impact is also discussed, leading to a call to move forward toward more open pedagogical practices. Challenges are noted and suggestions offered for improvements in OER programs. The study concludes with how other libraries can use these results to inform plans for further adoption of open initiatives at their institutions.

**Keywords:** open educational resources, survey, perceptions, attitudes, librarian

A growing number forward-thinking librarians are exploring open education (e.g., data, research, educational resources) (Spilovoy 2018). This shift reflects a decreasing emphasis on permissions and protections of academic materials toward an increasing focus on how to best share and use information. However, as with many emerging technologies, the initial understanding of librarian work with open education has been limited to anecdotal narratives and general surveys about satisfaction. There is little empirical information, relative to other studied topics, that specifically detail what librarians currently view as the best direction for normalizing and sustaining open education practice.

To address this dearth of information and as a preliminary step toward more programmatic intervention, librarians were surveyed regarding their perspectives on open educational resources (OER). Findings suggest that as librarian roles evolve from being gatekeepers of information to becoming more proactive pathfinders of access, their responsibilities and accountable actions are changing as well. This recognition provides a clearer sense of future direction for academic libraries and opens possibilities for new workflows, programs, and services.

**Review of the Literature**

OER are defined as “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” (UNESCO 2017). They include a variety of formats and media such as textbooks, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video, and animation.

Much of the OER research to-date has focused on cost savings, student and faculty satisfaction, and improved flexibility for instructors (Hilton 2016). Results show that adoption of OER can save students money, provide faculty with greater flexibility for course customization, and encourage student engagement. Five frequently mentioned characteristics of OER materials include the “5Rs,” which allow educators to “Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix and Redistribute” content for educational purposes (Wiley 2014). These characteristics represent the potential for additional benefits from educational resources not commonly found in traditional instructional materials.

OER is also a means to improve and enhance learning and teaching, and it is most effective when coupled with opportunities for feedback and inclusion (Wiley 2014). For example, a large scale ($n=21,822$) study reported that using OER improved course grades and decreased the number of students receiving failing grades or withdrawing from a course by federal Pell grant recipient students and populations historically underserved by education (Colvard, Watson, and Park 2018). Miller and Homol (2016) examined OER’s role in specialized areas, such as online education, where ensuring students have access from the first day of class may be particularly relevant in contributing to successful learning outcomes.

There has not been nearly as much research into other stakeholder perceptions of OER including librarians, instructional designers, IT specialists, bookstore managers, and other ancillary staff. Palmer, Dill, and Christie (2009) and Mercer (2011) provide notable exceptions in providing foundational baseline data for librarians. Additional research is timely because the growing use of OER offers a leadership opportunity for libraries to transform education and to
build community (Jensen and West 2015). Libraries have been encouraged to play a pivotal role in assisting with OER adoption from both the bottom up and top down, administratively. Walz (2015) describes several programmatic ways that librarian engagement contributes to OER use. They include creating OER finding, instructional, and pedagogy guides and curating library-selected OER collections. Cross (2017) describes how librarians are frequently becoming more involved with course-based learning objectives and can assist with OER initiatives. For example, librarians’ traditional areas of expertise are often well suited to OER support as natural extensions of what they already do in other library activities. This can include roles in tailoring materials, negotiating use, discovering content, locating unique materials, enhancing sustainability, creating digital materials, updating formats and tools, ensuring accessibility, etc.

There have been calls in the literature for OER adoption in specific disciplines (Anderson et al. 2017) and at the state (Bell and Salem 2017; McBride 2019), national (Allen, Bell, and Billings 2017), and international (UNESCO 2017) levels, with roles for librarians to play in each. Scaling OER programs into larger networks, consortia, and partnerships provides motivation for those just getting started with OER and improved evidence of impact and can influence direction for policymakers.

Encouraging and advocating for libraries to establish communities of practice is highlighted as a way to develop a programmatic response for implementation and sustainability (Smith and Lee 2017). Taking full advantage of OER calls for partnerships to be enhanced within institutions among librarians, instructional designers, IT, teaching and learning centers, etc., across institutions (Salem 2017) and beyond.
OER - Critiques and Challenges

Without research on how librarians can be effective using their skills and knowledge for OER use, there are almost guaranteed inefficiencies in program results. Libraries have met with mixed success in their role of supporting OER. These results may be partially due to inertia, disinterest, resistance, or a lack of immediate success. More general critiques of OER include concerns related to unpaid labor, changes in workflow, and unfunded mandates (Crissinger 2015; Pierce 2016; Sanjaya 2017). While many of these issues are not unique to OER and can be found in other areas of higher education, they are especially important as OER is facing a tipping point in adoption and sustainability. These topics deserve to be reviewed with “eyes wide open” to ensure adherence to best practices related to open principles and tenets espoused by OER advocates, particularly regarding issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion. OER is also subject to criticism from those who do not want to see wholesale adoption without a deeper look at the foundation and values underpinning the larger education landscape.

Another criticism of OER is that discovery for specific subjects can be more difficult than expected. A plethora of open repositories with uneven quality of materials, questionable authorship, and missing or non-standard metadata contribute to this perspective. It is estimated that less than 10 percent of courses offered at a typical college institution currently have sufficient OER material available (Wiley 2019). This means that librarians may experience more difficulty in OER search and curation than they do with other materials. Fortunately, new OER online search tools, such as the Openly Available Services Integrated Search (OASIS) tool, will help this issue over time, but it can still be problematic in the short term.

Potentially more challenging is a lack of sustained faculty engagement and other barriers in adopting OER (Belikov and Bodily 2016). Faculty, librarians, and other academic support

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1 https://oasis.genesco.edu/.
staff may not be adequately trained or knowledgeable about OER, licensing, etc. (Mtebe and Raisamo 2014). Consequently, librarians may experience unprecedented resistance to OER adoption and need new types of professional development to accomplish their OER-related goals.

**OER - Toward A Framework for Action**

Surveying librarian perspectives can help establish a baseline for change and set direction for a common understanding, shared vision, and more realistic program expectations. ACRL’s “2018 Top Trends in Academic Libraries” reframes OER challenges into “opportunities for librarians to cultivate partnerships with faculty in the discovery, advocacy, and preservation of OER” (ACRL 2018). For example, success stories from librarians can be helpful in promoting and supporting open access (OA) and OER (Crozier 2018).

To help with OER development, a “Champion Mindset” has been proposed as part of a prescriptive change management strategy encompassing the following four dimensions (Alberta Open Educational Resources 2018) to encourage deeper engagement of librarians and faculty:

- **Focus on Why** - understand/analyze user needs and identify “what’s in it for them”
- **Maintain Objectivity** - listen to the positions of others including naysayers
- **Engage the Open** - encourage early adopters, connectors, enablers who are open to the OER message
- **Reinforce the Change** - build support and networks to strengthen/sustain change and evaluate the impact

These categories include much of the ethos, logos, and pathos persuasion arguments that have been used since Aristotle. They also resonate with Kotter’s change model (2012) and may provide rich ground to nurture and support those working with OER. They may be helpful in supporting librarians charged with building use cases for OER (Colson, Scott, and Donaldson 2017). From an instructional perspective, Woodward (2107) emphasizes advocacy, discovery and OER adoption in the creation of emerging educational models.
Purpose of This Study

Project Background

An online survey of academic librarians was conducted after the first year of a large infusion in funding for open educational resources in a multi-campus system to better determine librarian perceptions and activities related to open resources. A multi-pronged approach was used to leverage this windfall OER funding in several ways.

A centralized, dedicated support team was tasked with coordinating and leading the initiative, and provided support to individual OER leads on member campuses. The support team was led by an executive director, with contributed time from librarians, instructional designers, and helpdesk and other staff. OER training was offered via conferences, webinars, and individual meetings. Stipends were offered as incentives to faculty involved with OER. Curated weblinks were promoted widely and often augmented by campus library online OER LibGuides. Campus administrators, governance, and other groups were kept informed of the OER initiative and asked to promote it on their campuses to departments and faculty. Student and faculty champion panels were spotlighted in regional roadshows to reinforce and describe the impact on teaching and learning. Professional conferences, workshops, video broadcasts, and other online venues were used to raise awareness about the OER initiative well beyond library confines to encourage, reinforce, and celebrate interest as appropriate.

Scope

This study was designed to gauge librarian engagement in OER and solicit librarian stakeholder feedback about the topic. The primary intent was to provide a static snapshot of the librarian landscape within the broader spectrum of the overall OA environment. The overview
that it offers reveals a cursory glimpse into how respondents perceive OER, providing input for considering how to proceed and establish direction for future endeavors.

The survey was not designed to be a deep dive in order to comprehensively capture data about why or how librarians had acquired their OER attitudes, perceptions, or experiences. Likewise, it did not go into detail regarding background demographics. The survey met librarians where they were, and acknowledged their experience. Generous, voluntary, candid responses to the open-ended parts of the survey provided some of the most valuable insights and suggestions.

**Method**

A convenience sample of approximately 200 academic librarians on a statewide electronic listserv were invited to participate anonymously in an online Qualtrics survey regarding openness perception and practice. Two reminder emails were sent to encourage participation in the survey. Sixty respondents started the survey; forty-seven completed the survey during the fall of 2018, representing a 23 percent response rate. The majority of respondents were academic librarians and other library staff. Participants agreed to Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent and were able to skip questions or withdraw from participation at any time. The survey took approximately five to ten minutes to complete and consisted of ten multiple-choice and open-ended questions. See survey questions in Appendix 1.

As an incentive to complete the task, four $25 gift cards were awarded to respondents chosen randomly from a pool of those wishing to be included in a separate drawing held at the conclusion of the survey.

The survey was designed to provide insight into librarians’ perceptions related to the support, adoption, and usefulness of open activities. The open-ended qualitative responses complemented the quantitative replies and provided additional narrative for discussion.
Results

Survey respondents’ experience as academic librarians ranged from 0 to 10+ years. Regarding current status, 18 percent were non-tenure or professional track, 27 percent were pre-tenure, 50 percent were post-tenure, and 5 percent had other classification. Academic ranks included assistant librarian (12 percent), senior assistant librarian (21 percent), associate librarian (38 percent), librarian (26 percent), and distinguished librarian (3 percent).

All reported being extremely comfortable (67 percent) or somewhat comfortable (33 percent) with using technology. The limited sample size did not allow meaningful crosstabs by experience or technology use.

Q1. Please rank the ways that librarians contribute to OER success (1 = most important, 8 = least important):

Respondents were asked to rank the ways that librarians contribute to OER success (1 = most important, 8 = least important). Not surprisingly, a majority of respondents (21) believed that assisting faculty in how to find OER resources for their courses is most important. Helping students in the discovery and use of OER materials was also highly prioritized.

Providing workshops, mini-courses, reference guides (LibGuides), etc. received high marks too. Items that ranked lower included reviewing, editing, and developing OER materials, conducting research on OER, and supporting legislative advocacy and grant writing.

Table 1: Importance Ranking of OER Activities by Librarians
Q2. Do you agree or disagree with the following perspectives regarding OER?

The majority of respondents agreed that:

- they had their employer’s support to use OER in teaching and learning (93 percent)
- they already do or intend to use and integrate OER into their role as librarians (90 percent)
- using OER will likely increase the learning outcomes of students (88 percent).

Participants were more evenly divided when asked whether they agreed that:

- using OER is integrated into librarians’ responsibilities (54 percent)
- it is easy to become skillful at using and helping others integrate OER into their courses (56 percent)
• they already had the knowledge necessary to use and help faculty integrate OER in their courses (59 percent).

Figure 2A: Librarian Perspectives Regarding OER

Table 2B: Librarian Perspectives Regarding OER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Using OER will likely increase the learning outcomes of students</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 It is easy to become skillful at using and helping others integrate OER into their courses</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 My employer supports the use of OER in teaching and learning</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I already have the knowledge necessary to use and help faculty integrate OER into their courses</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I do, or I intend to, use and integrate OER into my role as a librarian</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Using OER is integrated into librarians' responsibilities</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3. Do you agree or disagree with the following reasons for using OER?

Additional questioning revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that OER is a natural extension of the discovery services that libraries have always provided (98 percent), librarians are helpful partners in influencing and encouraging OER initiatives (95 percent), OER can contribute to solving issues of social justice (92 percent), and involvement in OER is a good use of librarian time (92 percent). Conversely, 19 percent believe that the purported value of OER is exaggerated.

Figure 3A: Librarian Rationale for OER Use
Table 3B: Librarian Rationale for OER Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OER is a natural extension of the discovery service libraries have always provided</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarians are helpful partners in influencing and encouraging OER initiatives</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OER can contribute to solving issues of social justice</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purported value of OER is exaggerated</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in OER is good use of librarian time</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4. Which OER related activities have you participated in since Fall 2017?

Regarding surveyed librarian participation in OER-related activities:

- 20 percent attended or hosted an OER event
- 17 percent assisted scholars in finding openly licensed resources
- 16 percent developed a reference guide (e.g., LibGuide) to explain OA, OER, or other open concepts (e.g., open education, open science, etc.)
- 12 percent assisted or referred patrons with copyright questions related to using OER materials
- 11 percent applied a Creative Commons license and shared it
- 8 percent deposited OER in an institutional or online repository
- Only 3-4 percent of respondents reported presenting an OER session at a conference, helping someone find an open access journal, or publishing an open-access article.

Smaller percentages of respondents indicated they had:

- taught students how to apply Creative Commons licenses to their work
- supported OER group on campus by assigning librarians to serve on OER committee
- attended training on OER resources
- researched/written about open pedagogy
- provided references using OER
- referred patrons to high-quality OER.
Q4 Since fall 2017, please check all of the following you have done:

![Figure 4A: Librarian Participation in OER-Related Activities](image)

Table 4B: Librarian Participation in OER-Related Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended/hosted OER-related event on your campus</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deposited work in openly licensed institutional or online repository</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Creative Commons license to something you created, and uploaded for sharing</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisted scholars in finding openly licensed resources to use in their courses</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed a reference guide (e.g., LibGuide) to explain Open Access (OA), Open Educational Resources (OER), or other open concept (e.g., open education, open science, etc.)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped someone find an open access journal in which to publish</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented OER session at a conference</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Published an open access article</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisted/referred patrons with copyright questions related to using OER materials</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - please describe</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5. How Can OER Initiatives Be Sustained In The Future?

Participants were asked for their comments to the open-ended question, “How can OER initiatives be sustained in the future?” The thirty-two responses are summarized into the following categories. Three replies were non-committal, for example: “don’t know” and “can’t say.” Two comments were negative in tone: “Can’t. You get what you pay for” and “there are more important initiatives to work on.” The twenty-seven remaining responses included a variety of constructive suggestions, as described below. Some respondents gave multiple suggestions.

Common themes emerged about intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and recognition, budget and staffing, partnerships, training, and advocacy. Comments are listed below according to these themes.

**Rewards and Recognition**

- Tie OER to discretionary awards, tenure and promotion
- Get OER into tenure and promotion documentation
- There are still too many institutions where publishing in OER journals does not count, or count as much, for those on the tenure track
- An obstacle to promoting OER is that although some untenured faculty may want to become engaged with OER, they shy away because they think OERs are not highly regarded by their departments or will not help them get to tenure
- I think one key factor is that OER materials be considered in tenure packages so that faculty (teaching or otherwise) aren’t forced to publish in non-open journals or with non-open publishers on the basis of the journal’s or publisher’s cachet. Of course, funding is also important – not only to incentivize reconfiguring classes to use OER, but to support OER creation
- Provide faculty incentives for adopting and developing OER courses
- Pay faculty a minuscule amount to create OER curriculum
- Must be campus and system-wide support and incentives for faculty
- Administrations need to find a way to make OER very attractive to faculty and to provide incentive for faculty to take advantage of the OER resource guides we offer
- Institutional support for creation of OERs (release time, stipends for creators) and for repositories or open journals

**Budget and Staffing**

- Set aside 5% of library materials budget for OER
I am not sure – I am working with OER Services to create a sustainability plan. One of the things they have advised is to try to find a bit of funding from various departments (so that one department or office is not bearing the brunt of the cost)

- Financial investment in developing and maintaining them
- A dedicated position at our library is needed I think
- Reduce college administrators/middle manager – put funding into library OER
- One vital need is for library administrators to have the vision to recognize the value of this area and to support it accordingly. Since staff and money are always limited this will mean at times the willingness to critically examine long-standing staffing arrangements in order to ascertain whether or not they justify continuation in the present age and could not perhaps be shifted in this emerging area of OER, institutional repositories.

- Through reference/instruction/outreach – consider converting reference desk hours into OER efforts

**Partnerships**

- OER has to be recognized as not belonging to the library, but to the faculty. As such, joint cooperation between teaching and learning centers, Library and IT, with support from the Provost and College Senate, will be needed to make OER sustainable in the future
- Deans, Provosts, President need to partner with libraries in promoting creation and discovery of OER
- Continue to assess their value and gather data to demonstrate their value. Collaborate with new stakeholders
- Librarians are on board with OER and are willing to provide help and access to OER materials. However, once the librarians are on board, we are not the target group for OER - the real issue is getting faculty involved to use the library services related to implementing OER in their courses. Librarians can only do so much.
- Explore new models with publishers
- College-wide buy-in
- Continued support from University systems
Training

- Provide training on understanding open licensing; create metadata to better organize and locate openly licensed materials
- More education for librarians and faculty and a unified location of OER and resources
- Librarians must be proactive about showing faculty and students how OER can benefit them through programming and outreach. If they are to be leaders in these initiatives, they must be knowledgeable about the topics surrounding OER and exemplify how it can be used to positively impact the learning environment
- Funding for workshops to inform educators about value of and how to implement
- Provide professional development opportunities for librarians and faculty
- Additional professional development as the OER landscape changes plus institutional support for OER initiatives
- Educate faculty on copyright

Advocacy/Other

- Key stakeholders (faculty governance, faculty, Academic Affairs, library directors and librarians, students) need to be involved in campus OER initiatives
- Form a campus committee through faculty governance
- Tag the OER courses with an OER attribute in the course registration system
- Create procedures for reviewing OER syllabi to assess if they meet the criteria to be labeled an OER course
- Support from OER Services has been crucial and should continue
- Have discussions with chairs/deans, tenure and promotion committees, college governance committees, to stress the importance of supporting faculty who publish and develop OER materials
- Advocates need to provide clear information about the value of “open” to their stakeholders and have discussions with the hope of changing the skeptics’ perceptions of open scholarly publishing and open educational resources. In time, there will be more peer-reviewed open resources available to help strengthen the case for open educational resources.

Q6. Other comments regarding librarians perspectives on OER:

The opportunity to provide additional open-ended comments about OER or the study produced a number of other suggestions and more feedback. These unfiltered comments are powerful in helping to convey tone as well as content and are shown below.

One respondent offered several ideas for increasing librarian advocacy:

Here are some ways librarians can advocate for OER.
• Become informed about the open movement. Read! Network! Attend conferences, workshops, and webinars! Take the Creative Commons Certificate course (https://certificates.creativecommons.org/!
• Reference Librarians: When library users ask for resources, in addition to finding resources in the library collection, recommend works in the public domain and openly licensed materials when possible.
• Catalogers: Include records for open access journals in the catalog.
• Acquisitions: Curate open resources. Why buy a print book if it’s freely available in the public domain?
• Instruction Librarians: When collaborating on designing a library workshop with the professor of the course, recommend including open resources when possible.
• Create LibGuides with resources and information about open educational resources, open access, Creative Commons, public domain works, etc.
• Reach out to faculty one-on-one to discuss open educational resources. Bring a print copy of an OpenStax (https://openstax.org/) textbook that fits with a course the professor is teaching. Let her/him know that it’s freely available online.
• Offer workshops and other professional development opportunities for faculty.
• Engage in conversations about open values, open access, and open education with your library director and library colleagues.
• Provide your fellow librarians with resources like the OER: A Field Guide for Academic Librarians (https://commons.pacificu.edu/pup/3/).

Modeling good practice by incorporating OER in library instruction was suggested:

Use OER in Library Research Methods and Information Literacy courses.

Ensuring librarians are up-to-date and knowledgeable in searching for quality OER was mentioned:

Librarians need to learn good OER sites, repositories, search tools to best assist faculty. Add OER searching to reference work. Care and go beyond simple Google search for OER. Engage the faculty as partners.

Having a librarian available to help with OER is a good thing, but it can sometimes be too much for faculty members (especially if working with a specific librarian is TOO HARD). Also, librarians have to care about what they're doing and not just do a half-hearted job of their searches. Doing a Google search and pointing to the top resources without knowing something about the field isn't useful either.

As one advocate commented:
Librarians seem uniquely situated to have a strong impact on the future of OER and helping to make it more easily searchable; also in helping to continue to remove the stigma of openly licensing research vs. using traditional publishers. We (librarians as a profession) also understand the importance of freely and widely available information in a timely manner (not behind a pay-wall or embargoed for time periods) to help move research forward.

Direct impact was stated as:

I see the largest impact of OER on the student's bottom line for classroom materials.

The need to include student voices was mentioned:

At our specific institution and, a takeaway from the OER meeting, having faculty involvement along with their leadership for OER initiatives is critical. I would also recommend student involvement.

At least one respondent was unsure of OER content:

Not really certain how useful these materials are.

One person did not want to lose traditional search methods and said:

Should stick to tried and true methods of scholarship, there is too much “junk” out there already.

Another respondent wrote:

I think it will be a challenge to change librarians' perceptions regarding their involvement in curricula material.

A common OER perception was described this way:

Using library subscription resources that are 'free' to end-users should also be a part of the OER initiative for college libraries - I am concerned that focusing on freely available resources only, will continue to encourage and teach users to rely on free Internet sources and disregard the valuable resources libraries offer. The OER initiative is to reduce costs to students - incorporating database articles and other readings into a course should be part of this - or we are going to OER ourselves out of business.

Staying open to the potential for OER was reflected by this statement:

I’d like to learn more. It's a buzzword for sure but sometimes I'm not really sure how I can personally use it to make a difference in my own work.

Discussion
Limitations

This survey collected discrete data across the multi-institution organization, and while it provides answers, it also triggers additional questions. It would be helpful to learn why more librarians did not participate in the survey, as well as have the opportunity to pursue follow-up queries encompassing a much broader number of topics about how academic librarians relate to OER.

Although some of the survey's prompted questions generated responses that were not very surprising, they remain useful in confirming shared viewpoints. The survey sections with open-ended questions probed a bit further, and allowed librarians to comment and brainstorm about a wider range of topics of concern. Since there were no "right or wrong answers" about opinions, attitudes, or perceptions, all feedback was valuable.

Future research on this topic should also encompass a larger sample to improve reliability and validity. Better demographic identifiers would allow comparisons by librarian title, library experience, age, gender, technology use, etc. Comparing perspectives of librarians with other stakeholders such as instructional designers, centers for learning and teaching staff, and others could provide additional viewpoints when planning. This study was also conducted after the first year of substantially increased funding of OER initiatives and repeating the survey in the future may provide examples of developmental changes in the program over time and longer-term impacts.

Summary

The results of this brief survey function as a springboard that can be used to translate themes into potential follow-up action items. Due to many appropriate unique paths that can lead
to successful results, it was evident that librarians, as a whole, prioritize flexibility as OER activities are embedded or transformed into new education models.

Survey comments revealed that individuals within the librarian community have different mindsets as well as different skillsets. Some perceived obstacles to embracing OER could potentially be readily tackled in a straightforward manner, while other nuanced, layered, systemic issues are more complex and justifiably require more time and effort to address. Librarians conducting a “listening tour”, where they meet with instructors regarding course materials, may provide insights into additional faculty perspectives on OER needs (Bell and Johnson 2019). Sharing ideas about lessons learned, as well as constructive suggestions for items to include in an academic librarians' well-stocked OER toolkit, are important parts of the collaborative process required for successful OER implementation.

This study affirms that there is much more work to be done regarding the perceptions and practice of openness among academic librarians. It highlights that while there is general consensus in certain areas, by contrast, in other aspects, surveyed librarians vary significantly in being ready, willing, and able to embrace OER.

The quantitative questions garnered several salient insights that were especially noteworthy. There were issues where participating librarians were almost evenly split in their agreement or disagreement with OER-related statements. In the past year, less than 20 percent of surveyed librarians had participated in ten of the most common OER activities, indicating possible room for growth. Although it was a limited viewpoint, 20 percent of the respondents believe that the value of OER was overrated. The qualitative open-ended questions soliciting other comments yielded additional relevant observations regarding recommendations for practice and policy.
Based on the results of this and other published research, there are some innovative ways that librarians are infusing components of openness into their work within academic settings. Focusing on outreach, promotion, and planning to support openness in instruction, discovery, research, and preservation are just some of the ways librarians are adding value to the open education enterprise. For example, planning OER faculty learning communities (https://innovate.suny.edu/sunyoercommunitycourse/), incorporating OER into library liaison work, and identifying OER faculty and student champions can help amplify program benefits. Underscoring the multi-disciplinary, collaborative effort needed to embrace and sustain openness also requires significant ongoing flexibility, motivation, and upkeep for success.

This survey used in this study may be easily adapted by other institutions striving to encourage new ways of thinking about librarianship and reshaping library services in an open education world. It can be used by any size institution, publicly or privately funded, in any geographic location, at any point in time in their OER implementation process. Organizations can use the results to inform plans for further adoption of open initiatives at their respective institutions. Respecting organizational culture, governance, and campus politics as well as how OER bests fits in an institution’s ability to incorporate change, are some of the more intangible keys to program success. Developmental transformation takes time, and along with other constraints, such as budget or other competing priorities, requires sustained commitment by the library and campus stakeholders.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Embedding “openness” as a core library value aligns with most institutions’ strategic goals, and can help in building a bridge to library programs and services of the future. Identifying and sharing best practices encourages scholarly communications to support open
educational resources and open scholarship, and highlights the need for future integrated planning efforts to support other digital scholarship initiatives.

The recommendations below for advancing the OER conversation are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. It is not required that these takeaways be done in any particular order. Many are interdependent, and are best viewed as a menu of possibilities.

- Enlist and encourage librarians as change agents early in the process
- Continue to encourage OER use in tenure and promotion reviews
- Cross train for sustainability
- Use library/instructional design/teaching and learning center teams as support networks
- Develop coalition of partnerships with willing faculty and students
- Embed openness in scholarly communications as appropriate
- Reward early adopters; show appreciation for champions including students
- Recruit peer-to-peer OER ambassadors to carry the message
- Track impact on institutional goals such as retention, grades, graduation rates, alumni placement, etc.
- Identify OER in course catalogs and registration materials
- Offer continuous online OER training for those just getting started
- Build in a refresh cycle for existing course transformation, and rubrics for new courses
- Include feedback systems and analytics as appropriate
- Coordinate with IT for compatibility, integration and support
- Keep a sample of easily accessible OER (e.g., OpenStax materials) in the library for faculty to review at their convenience.
- Consider promoting OER benefits for targeted audiences or needs (e.g., long distance learners)
- Strengthen and share research about OER best practices
- Recognize social justice and policy implications of OER use
- Document and celebrate OER success stories; mentor and help others

OER has the distinction of being one of the most tangible efforts in the open environment that resonates with librarians to date. Moreover, it is being adopted at the K-12, secondary, as well as the college level. Librarians can help with OER development at each of these levels, and can assist in graduate education and library schools to instruct and inspire new generations of teachers about discovering, evaluating, and using open resources.
OER may become more ingrained in instruction, fizzle, or be co-opted into larger educational reform efforts such as the move toward open pedagogy (DeRosa and Jhangiani 2017). OER may follow a typical technology diffusion model of early adopters and laggards (Rogers 2003). It has become part of the larger open movement conversation as part of open access, open pedagogy, open data, etc. (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC n.d.)

While the impact of large, diffuse educational initiatives like OER are notoriously difficult to quantify, enough small successes are being documented to justify additional work in the area. Student achievement, retention, and graduation rates are among the variables that will help determine success in the future. Additional evaluation and assessment of these efforts will be needed for a deeper understating of what works well and what does not in various situations.

Tapping librarians’ perceptions regarding OER is a first step in working toward deeper engagement, growth, and development of OER programs. It provides a quick view of librarians’ tolerance for risk, acceptance of change, and willingness to develop new partnerships for student success. It can act as a barometer for gauging development of future academic library services and act as a catalyst for shaping policy and practice.
References


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Belikov, O. and R. Bodily. 2016. “Incentives and Barriers to OER Adoption: A Qualitative Analysis of Faculty Perceptions.” *Open Praxis* 8 (3).


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Appendix 1

OER Librarian Perceptions and Practices Survey

Q1. Please rank the ways that librarians contribute to OER success (1 = most important, 8 = least important):
   _____ Teaching faculty how to find OER materials for their courses
   _____ Assisting students in discovery and use of OER materials
   _____ Promoting/sharing success stories about OER adoption
   _____ Serving on OER advisory committees; developing OER policy (e.g., tenure and promotion documents)
   _____ Providing workshops, mini-courses, reference guides (LibGuides), etc.
   _____ Reviewing, editing, developing OER materials
   _____ Conducting research about OER
   _____ Supporting legislative advocacy; grant writing
Q2. Please respond to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>I Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using OER will likely increase the learning outcomes of students</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy to become skillful at using and helping others integrate OER into their courses</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer supports the use of OER in teaching and learning</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I already have the knowledge necessary to use and help faculty integrate OER into their courses</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do, or I intend to, use and integrate OER into my role as a librarian</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using OER is integrated into librarians responsibilities.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q3. Please respond to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OER is a natural extension of the discovery service libraries have always provided</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarians are helpful partners in influencing and encouraging OER initiatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OER can contribute to solving issues of social justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purported value of OER is exaggerated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in OER is good use of librarian time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4. Since fall 2017, please check all of the following you have done:

- [ ] Attended/hosted OER-related event on your campus
- [ ] Deposited work in openly licensed institutional or online repository
- [ ] Applied Creative Commons license to something you created, and uploaded it for sharing
- [ ] Assisted scholars in finding openly licensed resources to use in their course or coursework
- [ ] Developed a reference guide (e.g., LibGuide) to explain Open Access (OA), Open Educational Resources (OER), or other open concept (e.g., open education, open science, etc.)
- [ ] Helped someone find an open access journal in which to publish
Submitted to an open access journal

Published an open access article

Assisted/referred patrons with copyright questions related to developing OER materials

Other - please describe

Q5. How can OER initiatives be sustained?

Q6. Please indicate your current status:
   ○ Non-tenure or professional track
   ○ Pre-tenure
   ○ Post-tenure
   ○ Other - Please describe

Q7. Please enter your academic rank if applicable:
   ○ Assistant Librarian
   ○ Senior Assistant Librarian
   ○ Associate Librarian
   ○ Librarian
   ○ Distinguished Librarian
   ○ Other - Please describe
Q8. Years of academic librarian experience:
- 0-1
- 2-5
- 6-10
- 10+

Q9. Please rate your comfort level with technology
- Extremely comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Neutral
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Extremely uncomfortable

Q10. Other comments regarding librarians’ use of OER:

Thank you for your response regarding open practices in higher education.