Seeking Alternatives to High-Cost Textbooks: Six Years of The Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Introduction
This article explores the development of the Open Education Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, one of the earliest library-led OER initiatives. The Open Education Initiative is an incentive program that offers UMass Amherst instructors small stipends or grants to explore alternatives to high-cost textbooks. The origins of the program in 2009–11 through its use today are discussed. Strategies around funding, campus partnerships, implementation, and assessment are considered.

Origins
In the winter of 2009, Scholarly Communication and Special Initiatives librarian Marilyn Billings traveled to the ALA Midwinter meeting in Denver. Along with former W.E.B. Du Bois Library Director Jay Schafer, she attended a panel sponsored by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) entitled “The Transformative Potential of Open Educational Resources (OER)” (Malenfant, 2008). The panel featured OER pioneers Richard Barniuk, the founder of Connexions, now OpenStax; David Wiley, a leading openness advocate and thinker; Nicole Allen, then an organizer with PIRG (Public Interest Research Group), now Director of Open Education for SPARC; and Mark Nelson, of the National Association of College Stores, NACS. Billings and Schafer came back to Amherst inspired by the panel and began to contemplate how they might introduce some of the ideas at UMass Amherst.

The idea of incorporating open educational resources (OER) into the work of the library was a natural one. In 2006, Billings had launched
ScholarWorks, a Digital Commons–hosted institutional repository, to house the scholarly output of the University. While building ScholarWorks between 2006 and 2009, Billings reached out to college deans, the Graduate School, Faculty Senate, and administrators about the value of open access publishing of scholarly material. This became even more topical as federal funding agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, began to issue open access mandates for all grants, which opened an opportunity to work with the Office of Research on guiding the campus policy around open access.

As Billings and the library thought about new ways to encourage faculty to consider using OER, SPARC hosted a member phone call with Stephen Bell, the Associate University Librarian for Research & Instructional Services at Temple University, and Eric Frank, a UMass Amherst grad and co-founder of Flat World Knowledge. At the time, Flat World Knowledge was a publisher of free openly licensed textbooks. On the February 2011 call, Bell discussed Temple’s then brand new Alternate Textbook Project, (subsequently renamed the Textbook Affordability Program), which seeks to “encourage faculty experimentation and innovation in finding new, better and less costly ways to deliver learning materials to their students” (Bell, 2007). Temple’s program offers “incentive grants” of $500 for faculty to: “create an alternate to the traditional textbook using a combination of Open Educational Resources (OER) and licensed library content” or “adopt an existing open textbook and use it to replace the existing commercially published textbook”. Bell’s program inspired Billings to create a similar program at UMass Amherst and in April of 2011, the first round of grants for the effort, billed as the Open Education Initiative (OEI), was announced and disbursed.

It should be noted here that one of the driving forces for launching the OEI in 2011 was the seemingly unending rise in the cost of textbooks and the increased attention being paid to student debt. In addition to the cost of textbooks, UMass Amherst also had a serious budget cut in

1 Flat World has since rebranded and focuses on low-cost customizable textbooks and homework systems instead of free openly licensed ones. Their new content is no longer published with an open license, but the original line of open textbooks is still available in places like the Open Textbook Library.
2008 that led to a larger than usual increase in the cost of attendance. The institution was still feeling the effects of that in 2009–10. As Sara Goldrick-Rab has so eloquently explored in her devastating study of the cost of college for today’s students, Paying the Price, students sometimes drop classes, work an extraordinary amount of hours outside of school, purchase course materials with student loan money, lack food and housing, or leave school with no degree and a generation of debt (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

The 2002 UNESCO Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries, which ostensibly launched the current wave of the OER movement, recognized the potential that OER had to overcome educational barriers in the developing world. The report issued at the end of that conference pledged to “develop together a universal educational resource available for the whole of humanity” (UNESCO, 2002). It has become increasingly clear in the ensuing decade and a half that this need is as great in the United States as it is throughout the world.

Implementation

Building a grant program in a large academic library with no permanent support staff was not easy. Fortunately, support for the program came easily from Schafer and James V. Staros, the UMass Provost at the time. Director Schafer was a strong supporter of OER (he was on the 2011 SPARC phone call) and convinced Staros to commit some discretionary funds toward the project if the library would match it. Staros was a former faculty member himself and was familiar with the burden placed on students. Billings, with the help of a resident librarian (a program for early career scholarly communication librarians), managed the mechanics of the grant. She also enlisted departmental librarians to announce the grant to their faculty and provide support once the projects began. Her vision was to integrate OER work into the existing workflows of academic support units within the library.

To ensure that grants were selected by a cross-section of campus support staff, an advisory group was created to help choose successful recipients for the grant. The group had representation from Academic Computing, the Center for Teaching and Office of Faculty Development,
and the Academic Information Technology Program. Collaboration was a central tenet of the OEI and reflected the library as the hub of campus support for open access projects and student success. What distinguished the UMass and Temple effort from earlier OER projects was the fact that it was led by the library rather than educational technologists, distance learning course designers, or international education groups, such as had been done by previous early-to-mid aughts OER projects (Smith & Casserly, 2006).

An initial funding amount of $10,000 was settled on for the inaugural round. $5,000 came from the Provost’s Office and $5,000 from the library. Compared to large, administratively-led, foundation-sponsored, campus-wide open education efforts such as MIT’s OpenCourseWare project, the UMass plan was decidedly humble (Abelson, 2008). An information session was held for prospective applicants where various aspects of OER were discussed, such as available library and openly licensed material, copyright, technology, and pedagogy. Representatives from the library, Center for Teaching, and Academic Computing all offered their support for prospective projects. Eight faculty members from the colleges of Education, Humanities & Fine Arts, Natural Sciences, and Social and Behavioral Sciences, as well as management, submitted proposals. In April of 2011, the first round of grant winners was announced.

Initially, the OEI was focused on textbook affordability, which resonated with students, faculty, and administrators. Because of that, there was not a strict emphasis on OER. Licensed commercial library materials and services such as ebooks, article databases, reserves, archival material, and interlibrary loan, were shared with grant applicants as well. When discussing library-licensed content with faculty, it is important to emphasize that these are distinct from OER in that they are free for everyone at the institution but not open and not free to the library. Many library materials do not pass David Wiley’s 5R test for OER: retain, revise, remix, reuse, redistribute. Wiley himself believes that there is too much emphasis by libraries on affordability and not enough on the pedagogical and ownership freedoms that OER affords (Wiley, 2017). If an OER or affordability effort is led by a library, it is natural that library offerings would be discussed. The high cost of textbooks is an easy entry point to begin talking to faculty about the other tenets of OER such as creating, revising, and sharing.
openly licensed material in new conceptual ways. This can also segue nicely into larger discussions about open access research and scholarship.

The initial outreach strategy for the OEI was fairly simple. An information session was held for all prospective applicants, advertised through typical library channels such as posters around campus, a press release, and website placement. These events were aimed not only at faculty considering applying for our grant, but anyone on campus, including administrators, interested in the concept of OER. The workshops consisted of overviews of copyright, OER vs. licensed library content, technological and pedagogical support, and more. This was also an opportunity for the faculty to hear about each other’s proposals and get ideas on how they might structure their own.

The core team then got together to review the applications. During this first round there were not more applications than there was funding, so the selection criteria did not need to be rigorous. However, as the program has become more recognized, this is no longer the case. For this first round, all eight instructors received $1,000 grants.

Among the first OEI cohort were instructors from across many academic areas of the university: education, women’s studies, art, animal science, natural resource policy and administration, communication, sociology, and management. The initial round of projects included: adopting an OER Flat World accounting textbook, creating an open natural resource policy lab manual, authoring an introductory women’s, gender, and sexuality studies textbook, utilizing library databases for a language arts course, and finding interdisciplinary OER case studies for a graduate-level communication course. The projects varied between adoption, adaptation, and creation of OER, non-OER, and library materials. We found that a majority of the projects were hybrid projects, meaning they used existing as well as newly created content.

The program was a hit and ended up saving students approximately $101,632 from 2011 to 2015 from an initial investment of $10,000. 2015 is the last year on record that any of the original eight faculty taught the class that used the material developed with OEI money. Of course many of these faculty have continued to use OER in their other classes and have convinced colleagues to do the same or apply for the OEI. The second round of grants was done in the fall of 2011. This time, the budget was
increased to $15,000. The cost was again split between the library and the Provost's Office. For this round it was decided to offer more money for larger classes due to the fact that the $1,000 grants were only attracting small, upper-level classes. Based on the Provost Office's experience with other grant programs, it was decided that a larger amount of $2,500 might attract instructors from larger classes who felt that the higher amount was worth their time and risk.

The second round attracted 13 applicants from a diverse range of colleges and departments including: agriculture, civil and environmental engineering, public health, anthropology, chemistry, and geoscience. All 13 applicants were able to receive funding and, again, put forth a wide range of projects that have saved students $167,964 since 2012. Some of these courses continue to be taught; but it is often the case that an instructor will rotate out of teaching a class and we have not tracked whether the following instructor has continued to use the open/free materials. However, we have found that many of the faculty who participate in the OEI continue to seek out alternatives to high-cost textbooks in their other classes whenever possible.

In the ensuing six years, the library has orchestrated eight rounds of grants, saving students a total of $1.8 million dollars.\(^2\) The schedule has been slightly erratic due to staffing variables and funding. Some years, we were able to offer two rounds, while others we only offered one.

Our grantees are required to do the following:

- Attend a kickoff meeting where we answer questions, discuss open licensing and copyright, and outline technological, pedagogical, and research support.
- Circulate a qualitative and quantitative survey to all of their students at the end of the first semester they utilize the materials.
- Provide a copy of the revised syllabus or course outline used for the class.

\(^2\) This figure includes every instance of the class taught by the faculty who received the funds. So if a faculty member from 2012 has taught a class three times, we multiply the average new/used cost of the original book times the total number of students in each of the three classes. Other initiatives simply use an average of $100 for every book.
• Deposit any openly licensed material created into an appropriate open repository (e.g. UMass’ ScholarWorks, Open Textbook Library, MERLOT (the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching), etc.)

• Write a final grant report that includes a narrative summarizing the challenges and accomplishments of their experience creating/finding/using the materials, the impact on their teaching, the impact on students and their performance, and lessons learned.

• Participate in long-term assessments of the Open Education Initiative.

Partnerships

Partnerships with other campus stakeholders are indispensable to any OER effort. As I have illustrated throughout this chapter, it is through these partnerships that we have been able to facilitate our initiative. There is another chapter in this book, which I contributed to, that goes into greater detail on campus partnerships, so I will give a cursory overview of the partners utilized here at UMass.

Instructional Innovation, formerly known as Academic Computing, is the office that bridges the gap between information technology and academics. Instructional Innovation offers hands-on technical help for any faculty wishing to utilize unfamiliar or cutting-edge technology in the implementation of their project. Instructional Innovation also participates in our workshop for grantees and helps select proposals.

The Center for Teaching Excellence and Faculty Development (TEFD) “supports the professional development of faculty across all career stages and disciplines with programs and resources focused on student-centered teaching, course and curriculum design, faculty mentoring, intercultural competency, scholarly writing, leadership, and more.” (“About TEFD”, n.d.) Among their many other offerings, TEFD aids faculty in transforming classes when the infrastructure provided by a traditional textbook is removed. TEFD also participates in our workshop for grantees and has a member on our selection team.

We partner with faculty by including one faculty member from the Academic Information Technology Program on our selection team. Having the perspective of faculty can help interpret ideas included in proposals. Faculty also collaborate with the library on OER forums and programs.
Throughout the history of our program we have had several panel discussions, presentations, and forums where past grant participants have discussed their projects. We have several OER “champions” on campus who share their OER experiences with colleagues. Faculty have also supported global OER efforts by attending an on-campus OER workshop led by the Open Textbook Network and authoring reviews of OER textbooks in the Open Textbook Library.

Students play a significant role at UMass Amherst. We are fortunate to have a very active PIRG (Public Interest Research Group) and student activists on the Student Government Association. Students help agitate administrators, faculty, and other students to advocate for the use of OER. Students in the MassPIRG chapter have met with the Provost to push for more institutional support for OER, staffed information tables around campus, and held public information sessions. They also held a rally in the library lobby about OER that was covered by local print media. The Student Government Association has passed resolutions in support of more OER adoption and given an “OER hero” award to an instructor who supported their students by utilizing OER. A possible next step could be for the Faculty Senate to adopt a similar resolution.

Obviously, the program could not prosper without the support of library and campus administrators. Funding and encouragement from administration has enabled our program to thrive for the past six years. With budgets always a concern, wider financial support from upper administration has been cautious. In the future, there may be opportunities to utilize student support funds for the development of OER as a driver of student retention, recruitment, and success.

Faculty support the OEI by participating in the program as well as by acting as ambassadors for OER to colleagues in their respective disciplines. Faculty at UMass Amherst have encouraged fellow instructors to apply for grants and have spoken at local and national events about their use or creation of OER. In our physics department, one faculty member began teaching an introductory physics course with the OpenStax College physics textbook. He then encouraged two additional faculty to apply to our initiative. They both moved to OpenStax and now the entire part 1 and 2 of introductory physics, featuring large, 150+ person classes, uses no textbook.
In addition to local on-campus partners, the library has partnered with national OER organizations that support our local work. These include the Open Textbook Network (OTN), Rebus Community, and OpenStax Institutional Partners. OTN is part of the Center for Open Education at the University of Minnesota and supports OER with three initiatives: the Open Textbook Library, Network, and Fellowship. UMass Amherst is a dues-paying member of the Network.

Being a member of the OTN has been beneficial for several reasons. In addition to a day-long workshop for librarians and faculty, we have participated in a pilot project to facilitate the development of open textbooks with Pressbooks and the Rebus Community. Pressbooks is a WordPress-based open source platform for presenting online texts in a “book-like” way. It also allows readers to download texts in multiple formats such as PDF, mobi, epub, XHTML, and more. The Rebus Community is a “non-profit organization developing a new, collaborative process for publishing open textbooks, and associated content. Rebus is building tools and resources to support open textbook publishing, and to bring together a community of faculty, librarians, students and others working with open textbooks around the world” (Rebus Community, 2017). It is through these local and national partnerships that we are able to provide high-quality support for OER initiatives.

Assessment

Although not at the top of everyone’s planning list, assessment is a key element of any OER initiative. Data gathered through assessment can illustrate to library and campus administrators that an investment of resources in OER is a sound financial and pedagogical decision. Even if the resources aren’t immediately available to process and analyze the data, it should be gathered at the beginning of any initiative for future examination. The more data collected, the more opportunities to illustrate the success of a program and share local results with national OER assessment efforts.

As the OEI developed over time, we amassed lots of qualitative and quantitative data. Initially, not much had been done to analyze it. This was mostly due to the constraints put on the project by the lack of a full-time position. Once that position was filled, we were able to look at...
the data and gather more. We instituted some of the principles of the COUP Framework. COUP stands for costs, outcomes, usage, and perception. The COUP Framework was conceived of by David Wiley, Lance Fischer, and John Hilton III of the Open Education Group. The COUP Framework is an “approach to studying the impact of open educational resource...in secondary and post-secondary education” (Open Education Group, n.d.). The COUP looks at the financial impact of OER on students, the learning impacts of OER, the use/reuse of OER by students and faculty, and student and faculty perceptions of OER. Although the framework is primarily intended to analyze OER, we use it to assess our hybrid OER/free/low-cost materials approach.

As part of the application process, we ask faculty to include the title and average new/used cost of the current class textbook and the approximate number of students that will be in the class. Following the completion of the first semester using the OER/low-cost materials, we acquire the precise number of enrolled students from the online course catalog and multiply that by the average cost of the textbook to determine the money potentially saved by students. We have calculated this for all of the classes we’ve funded since 2011. We also add in cumulative data for each class over time. So if a class stopped using a $140 textbook in 2014 and has been taught twice since then, we multiply $140 times the number of students in all three instances of the class taught by the funded instructor.

All funded faculty are required to write a final 1–3-page grant report following the completion of their first semester using the materials they used or created. This report allows us to gather qualitative information on how the faculty used the materials as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness, coverage, rigor, and format of OER. We continue to engage with faculty over time by periodically sending out electronic surveys to gather their longitudinal perceptions of OER and their sense of student engagement with the material. We ask them if they have continued to use the material developed with the grant, used OER in other classes, converted colleagues to OER, and more. This helps us measure whether opinions and perceptions of OER among our grantees change over time.

We also survey students in the classes that we fund. We gather data on student perceptions of the OER/free/low-cost materials used in the
class. We ask what the students think about the quality of the materials and how they compare to traditional materials as well as their level of engagement in the course. We also ask the students about their general attitudes and behaviors around textbook purchasing such as what they do to avoid buying textbooks, how much they spend, and how the cost of textbooks has impacted their academic choices. We use this data mostly for advocacy with faculty and administrators.

We have compared results on the local Student Response To Instruction forms, which are filled out by students every semester, for classes before and after our initiative was introduced. Our data mostly mirrors data collected by the Open Education Group, which shows that students perform as well academically, if not better, in classes where access to the learning material is not hindered. In the future, we plan on doing more investigation into academic outcomes by comparing drop rates, graduation rates, and number of students receiving a C or better, in OER and non-OER classes.

Obstacles
As originally conceived, the UMass OEI was an experiment. It has essentially existed in beta form since 2011. This, of course, has positive as well as negative consequences. This next section attempts to address some of these, so one can potentially avoid some of the same pitfalls.

Staffing
Staffing can be one of the most challenging obstacles when managing a successful OER program in a library. Although elements of OER-related work can be found in many library areas like research support, reserves, acquisitions, archives and special collections, and scholarly communication, there are very few full-time staff devoted to OER. Here at UMass, the program was begun by the head of the Scholarly Communication department, who also managed the institutional repository, served on several internal and external committees, and was responsible for additional administrative tasks that did not allow the amount of time needed to administer an OER program. Luckily, the library had a resident librarian program, which funded recent graduates of library school to have real-world library experiences. These emerging professionals were enlisted to help with the administrative burden of managing the Open Education Ini-
tiative by tracking data, communication, arranging publicity and events, and supporting faculty once the projects were initiated.

We were fortunate to have the resident program, but the success of the initiative forced the library to commit to supporting it in a more substantive way with permanent staffing in the spring of 2015. At this point, my position in Special Collections and University Archives was temporary and the library had decided to make a stronger commitment to supporting OER work. I was asked to consider moving into a permanent position that would be dealing with all things OER, in addition to other scholarly communication-related work. I accepted the position of the Digital Project Manager, which became, in essence, an OER librarian.

The evolution from temporary to full-time staffing was due in no small part to the dogged advocacy efforts of Marilyn Billings and Library Director Jay Schafer. Without their belief in the centrality of the library’s role in this emerging field, it may have not survived past the pilot phase.

It is true that we are born of our own circumstances and that not every academic library has the resources to do what we have done. However, our experience has shown that if at least one person in the library is passionate about starting an OER initiative, and can garner administrative support for a pilot, and is successful, the benefits of the program will become evident and illustrate the clear need for more institutional programmatic support.

Grant Administration, Faculty Awareness, and Accountability

With the improvisational nature of the UMass OEI comes a fair amount of experimentation with how to administer a grant. Questions about the timing of funds, what the funds can be used for, and accountability all need to be addressed. Having a partner in the library business office is a must. The library business office will often be the ones who disburse money and will need to know when to transfer the funds, to whom, and how. Budget cycles must also be considered when planning the timing of a grant. Being in communication with the business office, the dean of the library, and your department is the best way to keep everyone in sync.

Anticipating potential issues with grant proposals can help make faculty proposals a success. Although the majority of our projects have run to
completion, a few have either not followed the original proposal in some way or have not happened at all. Out of the 60+ faculty who have participated in our initiative since 2011, only one received funds and did not complete their project. Faculty become very reliant on commercial textbooks to form the skeleton of their classes and sometimes don’t anticipate the fallout of removing it. Some proposals fail or alter after negative student feedback during the implementation semester.

Sometimes, while preparing their proposal, faculty will do a cursory search of the available material and once they actually start working on the grant, find it challenging to find appropriate open or library material. We also find that faculty have not thought through, or are unaware of, the differences between fair use, the public domain, Creative Commons-licensed material, free web content, and “free” library content. They also don’t necessarily know how copyright affects the 5 Rs.

One way to address these issues is to hold information sessions for applicants before the grant deadline or afterwards for grantees. Alternately, a one-on-one meeting can be held to tease out ambiguous language in proposals or explain misunderstandings. Asking the right questions on the proposal form is also important. We have oftentimes been able to meet with faculty in advance to help them shape their proposals. This always clears up misunderstandings and tempers expectations. The proposal process must force the faculty members to think through the consequences of their ideas clearly and cohesively.

Sustainability

Building a successful and sustainable OER program can mean different things to different institutions. What works for a statewide initiative with government funding will not work for a one-person program at a community college. Therefore, it is hard to define what a sustainable OER program looks like for everyone. Funding for our program has lasted six years so far, but could be cut at any point during an inevitable budget shortfall or financial crisis. Funding has fluctuated between the Provost’s Office, donations from the Friends of the Library, the Center for Teaching and Faculty Development, and more recently, a dedicated line item in the yearly library budget. The initiative has been very successful with participants, students, and administrators, but that is no guarantee of longevity.
Other obstacles to sustainability facing innovative initiatives like OER include some of the antiquated support systems currently available on college campuses. Donna Desrochers of the RPK Group, an education consulting firm, has spoken about this issue. She finds that although open to innovation, many campuses lack the organizational structure to sustain it. Funding models in higher education are outdated and not designed to incentivize innovation. There is a general lack of appropriate data systems to track the impact of innovative projects. Desrochers recommends several strategies for combating some of these barriers:

- Ensure stakeholders understand that OER is not just a “grant” or short-term initiative, but another tool to support student success.
- Communicate timeframes for achieving success.
- Begin planning early on to fund ongoing cost of supporting OER. Perhaps institute a course fee.
- Identify opportunities to reallocate resources.
- Capture potential return on investment for students, the institution and other stakeholders (Desrochers, 2017).

Since the OER position was created in 2015, we have attempted to find ways to make the program more sustainable. In late 2016, we wrote a proposal outlining how the OEI could improve and grow. Writing that the program was in a state of permanent beta, we presented the following five recommendations to the Provost and library dean:

1. **Increase funding**

Many faculty on campus would happily create open textbooks for use by their students for free if they were given the technical and financial support that matched what a commercial publisher can provide. Estimates of the costs associated with producing a new textbook range from $10,000 to $1 million. Currently, with our funding structure, it is a rare faculty member who is able to produce an open textbook for the amounts we provide. We believe that if we were to offer one or two incentives per year of at least $10,000 for the development of an open textbook, there would be significant interest from faculty. The University Libraries have recently partnered with Rebus/Pressbooks and the Open Textbook Network to provide technical support for the development of open textbooks by faculty at UMass Amherst. However, this
partnership does not account for the time that actually goes into the production of a textbook.

2. **Provide faculty release time to produce open materials**

According to the latest report from the Babson Survey Research Group on open textbooks, a significant obstacle to the adoption/creation of OER by faculty is time (Allen & Seaman, 2016). If faculty were given release time for the production of OER, it would eliminate this barrier. Another barrier for faculty is that work on original OER, and teaching activity in general, is minimized during the promotion and tenure process, especially at research institutions. If this were to change, we believe it would stimulate further work in the field. We acknowledge that this is more of a culture shift, but it is worth mentioning.

3. **Develop a campus-wide advisory group**

To reach the wider campus and increase its profile, the Open Education Initiative must create a campus-wide advisory group that consists of representatives from the student body, administration, the library, faculty, and University Press. This will not only highlight the support of the campus for the goals and mission of the OEI, but it will position us to broaden the initiative across the entire UMass system in the future. This will put us in line with other system-wide efforts such as Affordable Learning Georgia, California State University System, Open Oregon, and BCcampus in Vancouver, which according to a recent report from OpenStax are among the colleges that have saved their students the most during the 2015–16 academic school year (Ruth, 2016).

4. **Change funding structure**

To maximize the funds allotted to the OEI, we suggest offering four categories of grants based on the scope of the project. Typically, OER fall into three categories (adopt, adapt, or create). Adopt is simply the process of adopting an existing OER as is. Adapting is a hybrid approach in which one takes elements of multiple OER and constructs, or remixes, a cohesive corpus of material. Creation is the creation of OER from scratch. The fourth category is for projects that don’t fit neatly within any of the other three categories.

- **Category 1: Adopt**—Redesign course to incorporate an existing open textbook or open course content: $500.
• Category 2: Adapt—Combine existing OER with new open content to bridge gaps in available resources: $1,500.
• Category 3: Create—Create a new open educational resource or open course when there are currently no sufficient OER available to meet learning objectives. Range: $2,500–$10,000+.
• Category 4: Other—Projects not covered in any of the above: $TBA.

Many of our prior grants utilized library subscription materials in conjunction with other materials like blogs, websites, podcasts, and maybe some OER. These types of projects are not always considered open by the standard 5R definition and usually can’t be shared with others outside of the university. However, we have funded them because they are free or low cost and therefore fit within the larger goal of the OEI to reduce costs for students. Additionally, many faculty still require incentives to rework their syllabi. Although we should still fund these types of projects, we believe that these should fall within category 1. This then allows us to focus the funding on projects that are more fully “open.” Projects that aim to simply use existing library databases and other purchased materials can be funneled into the existing support infrastructure in the library and forgo funding.

5. Target Gen Eds

During the spring 2013 and 2016 grant rounds, we sought to target general education classes as an experiment. This reduced the number of applicants, but, once the projects are implemented, will impact more students. Many of the general education classes at UMass Amherst are large introductory courses that are geared towards non-majors. These types of classes are more likely to have quality OER available to them. In a recent study of UMass Amherst Gen Ed classes, we found a majority (26%) used commercial textbooks. It makes sense to target these specific classes, where there is a higher chance of OER being available. We would encourage all Gen Ed faculty to adopt existing free library resources, but would focus our funds towards those that wanted to develop, remix, or use open materials.

Of the five recommendations, only two were implemented during the spring 2017 grant round. We were able to secure some additional funding from the Provost’s Office in order to offer one $10,000 grant to a faculty member who wrote a proposal to author an open textbook on
radical social theory and we changed the funding structure to an adopt, adapt, create model, to shift the focus towards OER and away from library material. We plan on continuing to advocate for the other three recommendations and have discussed the possibility of creating a UMass system-run program that would provide funding and facilitation for the Amherst, Worcester, Dartmouth, Boston, and Lowell campuses.

Another area of future exploration for us will be the creation of a campus-wide OER policy. An OER policy can be a key ingredient in institutionalizing and sustaining OER across campus. Similar to an open access policy, it can serve the dual purposes of acquiring buy-in from a large swath of instructors and administrators and open up an opportunity to promote and enshrine the culture of OER within campus departments, Faculty Senate, the board of trustees, and state legislators. Lumen Learning, the OER course development company, has created an OER policy development tool on their website that allows anyone to choose one of several policy templates to customize for your environment (Lumen Learning). For OER to grow, it must move out of the grassroots and into the firmly rooted peaks of campus administration.

Conclusion
Having the vantage point of six years allows the UMass Amherst Libraries to look back at the successes, missed opportunities, and unforeseen pitfalls of their OER/affordability initiative. The overriding philosophy has always been improvisational. An idea may start one way, but will often respond to feedback or the changing campus and industry environment. The people served by OER, faculty, students, and administrators, are always exploring new ways of teaching, learning, and “administering,” so librarians must be prepared to respond. Whether one is planning an initiative for the first time, or is expanding an existing one, I hope the efforts of UMass Amherst will provide inspiration.

Although much of what libraries do is support students and faculty in their pursuit of knowledge, it is rare that they also help facilitate the creation of new materials that can be freely shared with the world, open new possibilities for teaching and learning, and remove a barrier for financially disadvantaged students. This is what makes the future of OER and libraries so exciting.
References


