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Takeaways from a Funded Campus OER Initiative at One Year

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Takeaways from a funded campus OER initiative at one year

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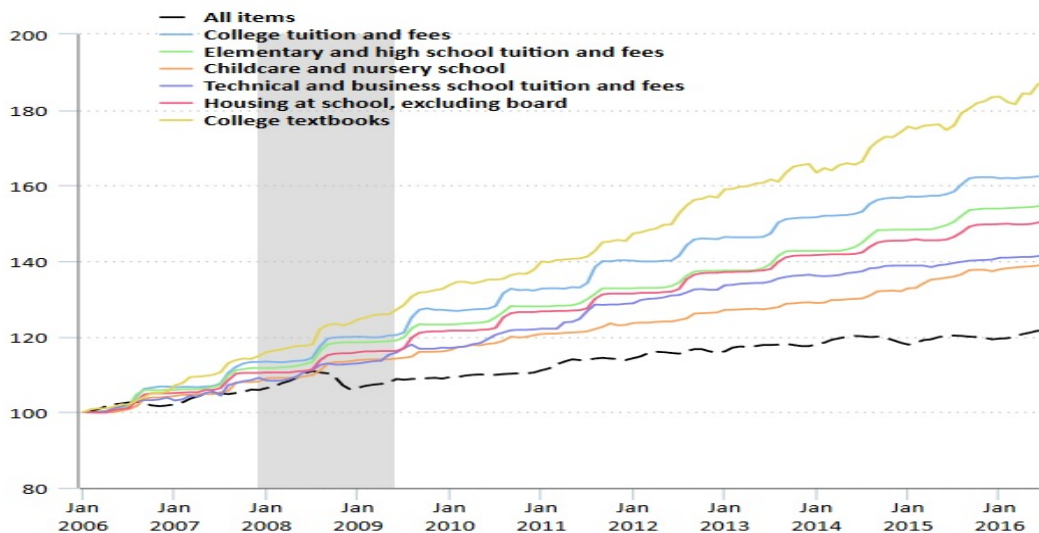
Indiana University, South Bend

[A 2016 survey](#) by Cengage predicted that OERs could make up 12 percent of the textbook market by 2021. Achieving the Dream's [Open Educational Resource Degree Initiative](#) is currently working with 38 community colleges to develop entire degree programs which exclusively use OER materials. The [State of New York](#) has approved \$16 million to promote OER use at City University and State University of New York, an initiative that has so far seen over 5,000 classes redesigned. Texas has created its own [OER grant program](#), and just last month the Department of Education awarded \$4.9 million to the University of California-Davis-led consortium to expand their [LibreTexts project](#).

It is evident that now is the time for institutions who have not yet established OER initiatives to consider doing so. With this in mind, I approached the IU South Bend Office of Academic Affairs in November 2017 with a proposal to start such an initiative on campus. In that presentation I chose to focus heavily on the possibilities of OERs to increase student success and retention, both the targets of initiatives at IU South Bend. Many students at IU South Bend are first-generation or non-traditional college students who are balancing school and family demands. Financial stability can be a concern.

As can be seen in this graph from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), textbook prices increased by 88 percent from 2006 to 2016, outpacing an average Consumer Price Index for all items of just 21 percent.

Consumer price indexes for tuition and school-related items, not seasonally adjusted, January 2006–July 2016
January 2006=100



Over the past five years, OERs have begun to have a major monetary impact in higher education. [OpenStax](#) alone estimates that, according to faculty self-reported adoptions of their textbooks, they alone have saved students at least \$155 million dollars since 2012. This number, of course, does not take into account the various other major providers of OER materials such as [OER Commons](#), [Open Textbook Library](#), [LibreTexts](#) or [Open SUNY](#).

I pointed out that, during this time, tuition at IU South Bend type-schools has increased by approximately 40%. Further, a [Student Public Interest Group report](#) from 2014 found that 65% of students reported not buying a textbook at some point because of cost and nearly half reported choosing classes based on textbook cost. I argued that for a university actively engaged in student success and retention initiatives, OERs should be an attractive option. Reports from three universities on student cost savings due to active OER programs proved valuable at this juncture: [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#), [Portland State University](#), and [George Fox University](#).

The gist of my argument was that not possessing a book for a class will damage a student's performance in that class. Further, if students are reporting both intentionally avoiding purchasing textbooks and enrolling in courses due to textbook prices, then this issue is harming both student success and enrollment. I finished with an overview of various OER resources, such as those linked to above, as well as smaller institutional-scale publishing programs such as the one at [Grand Valley State University](#).

The response of Academic Affairs was to generously fund both an annual workshop and an on-campus publishing initiative. The first step in planning the workshop was to reach out to the [University Center for Excellence in Teaching](#) at IU South Bend. This stakeholder was a natural partner for this kind of programming as they host a regular [teaching workshops for faculty](#).

The first funded year of the [Affordable Educational Resources Initiative](#) was aimed at both increasing the use of open educational resources (OERs) and [IU eTexts](#) and at publishing new OERs written by IU South Bend faculty. Over the summer we held our first Affordable Educational Resources Course Redesign Workshop. Twenty-four faculty and instructors attended five Friday sessions in which they learned about OERs, IU eTexts, and identified materials for integration into their courses. Completion of the workshop came with a \$1,200 stipend, courtesy of the IU South Bend Office of Academic Affairs.

In our meetings, we decided to focus both on OER materials and resources already available through subscriptions via IU eTexts or through library subscriptions such as ProQuest's Ebook Central or EBSCO eBook Collection. From the perspective of student success and financial relief, we wanted to focus not just on purely OER materials but also materials that students have access to at no additional cost or at least at a reduced cost.

In November 2018, we completed the first round of our OER grants initiative to fund faculty creation of OERs. The grant was for \$3,000 and comprised the other half of our initiative. We funded two proposals and are already consulting with faculty interested in applying for

the second round of grants. These materials will be published using [IU Pressbooks](#) and also hosted in [IU ScholarWorks](#).

The workshop was held in June and consisted of the following schedule:

June 1

Introduction to Open Educational Resources:

Guest speaker, Angel Mootispaw, Director of Instructional Technology for Southern State Community College in Ohio and OhioLINK Open Textbook Network System Leader.

June 8

IU eTexts

Guest speaker: Mark Goodner, Principal Business Analyst and Faculty Consultant for IU eTexts, Indiana University Bloomington.

June 15

Coursebuilder and library ebook subscriptions.

Guest speakers: Susan Thomas and Julie Elliott, IU South Bend Libraries.

June 22

Creating your own OER materials

Guest Speakers:

Diane Economakis, IU South Bend (who had already created an open workbook for W131 students)

Michele Kelmer, UNIZIN Principal IT Consultant for [Pressbooks](#), IU Bloomington

June 29

Final presentations

Each session started with about 20 minutes of free-sharing among the four attendees seated at each table. Faculty members were encouraged to find materials from the previous week's discussion and come to the workshop ready to discuss them. At the end of the free share a few faculty members would be asked to share with the class. This gave me the opportunity to walk around the room and listen for faculty concerns.

I found that a good strategy to address concerns about the quality of OER materials or challenges with teaching using all electronic materials was to ask already-identified faculty champions how they handled these issues. As faculty were registering for the course I asked each one if they had already used any OER materials in their classes and if so, what did they think. Through this I was able to identify several who had had good experiences and I could utilize their input in addressing faculty concerns in such a way that did not seem so much like me trying to give them a sales pitch.

Faculty also had two assignments to complete to receive credit for completing the workshop. The first was to identify an OER textbook within their area of expertise and post a review of that textbook on the workshop's discussion board on Canvas. The second was to identify an OER or eText that could be integrated into an existing class and redesign their syllabus for that class. Five volunteers presented their revised syllabi, though everyone handed one in. Presentations included integration of OER texts on [Anatomy and Physiology](#) and [Astronomy](#)

from OpenStax, American History from [American Yawp](#), parasitology resources from the [CDC](#), and [sustainability](#).

For the final presentations, faculty were asked to consider the following questions:

- 1) What viable options did you find, which ones did you use, how did you locate them?
- 2) Why did you decide on the specific resources you chose to integrate?
- 3) How did you incorporate the new materials and do you see any evident advantages to using them?

The partnership with UCET was perfect for the workshop, given their experience with running similar programming. For the OER creation grants, I wanted to find a similar stakeholder partner and as such reached out to the [Research and Development Committee](#), which hands out grants for research and course design, and on which I've served for the past two years. I received a great deal of help in adopting their research guidelines into our own [OER Grants Guidelines](#).

Our first deadline was November 5 and we funded both of the proposals we received. Dr. Terri Hebert, Chair of the Department of Professional Education Services, submitted a proposal entitled, "Intersecting Place-and-Problem-Based Education within Today's Elementary Classroom," a guide to place-based education in the sciences. Diane Economakis, head of the introduction to writing program at IU South Bend, submitted a proposal to create an online OER literary anthology for our W131 students. We are excited that these two proposals take different approaches to creation of open educational resources – a proposal for an original text covering a subject currently not addressed by an OER text and an innovative approach to using OERs to replace costly literary anthologies.

Some primary takeaways from starting and running this initiative, I would start with the initial presentation to stakeholders. I felt that tailoring the presentation to focus on issues of current importance to the university was highly successful. Look to see where your own university is currently spending money and labor on initiatives. The university administration has a vested interest in seeing those initiatives succeed, so explain how your own initiative could help.

The second takeaway would be to look for natural collaborators -- people who are already doing similar work on campus. They have a store of wisdom and experience waiting to be utilized. In my case, both the University Center for Excellence in Teaching and the Research and Development Committee have both been working on initiatives such as these for far longer than I've been a librarian. They were a natural fit and more than happy to help, which made everything run so smoothly.

Third, reaching out to experts to talk as guest speakers was quite fruitful. Having a limited knowledge of the IU eTexts program, for example, I reached out to Mark Goodner, IU's resident etext expert. For our talk on creating new OER materials, which was also a chance to advertise the first round of OER grants, bringing in an expert on Pressbooks was essential

as I had absolutely no knowledge of that software. I was able to find experts for each week who were passionate and willing to volunteer their time to talk to the workshop attendees.

Finally, I would recommend finding faculty allies, finding them early, and asking them if they would be willing to share. Every group of faculty in such workshops will have the vocal skeptics or even the outright opposed. There's nothing wrong with this – I wasn't hoping for a group of faculty who would accept everything they learned about OERs as gospel. However, it helped to have faculty members in the room to whom I could refer for their experiential knowledge. I felt that it made it more of a conversation and discussion rather than myself attempting to sell faculty on a product.