A survey of OER implementations in 13 higher education institutions

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Institutions in many jurisdictions are in the process of implementing Open Educational Resources (OER). In this investigation, we look into thirteen different efforts at the post-secondary level. Four are in three US community colleges and one university, and three Canadian universities and one Indigenous college. Internationally, five universities in Africa, the Middle East, South America and Southeast Asia.

The format of the inquiry followed a standard pattern beginning with the Opportunity: Why did they decide to implement OER. Then came a description of the Innovation: What they did. This was followed by the Benefits: What were the outcomes of the intervention. The Challenges were then requested: What were the problems in the implementation. Finally reporters were asked to comment on the Potential: How do they see the future of the project.

The data collected consisted of researching relevant papers and soliciting opinions from the lead participants. So, all information is direct from the local reporter or the documentation available. Points not stated by these reporters were not necessarily missing from their implementation, but they were not highlighted in the reports. The only consensus found among the different implementations was on the cost savings for students and/or the administration. There was no other generally agreed on opportunity, innovation, benefit, challenge or potential. Nor was there any other consensus among the institutions in Canada and/or the US, nor among the international institutions.

As noted above, cost savings for students was the only agreed upon consensus (12/13 institutions).

The lone outlier was an institution (Athabasca University in Canada) that included course material costs in with the tuition. This institution reported on significant savings for the institution. Seven other institutions also reported cost savings over and above those of the students.

For a small majority (7) of the institutions, the OER opportunity was catalysed by an external grant. Seven institutions also mentioned quality assurance as a major reason for deciding to implement. And, for seven institutions, teaching effectiveness was reported as being an important factor in their decision. Some institutions mentioned more than one of these factors. Smaller numbers (3 or 4) of institutions mentioned the following reasons: Their desire to promote innovation among the staff; aspiring for leadership in technology; encouraging both internal and external collaboration among faculty; using OER to more closely align the content with the curriculum; reducing development time; student retention; and student access. Significantly, only one institutions mentioned the desire to design a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course).

A significant number (5-6) of institutions reported that their innovation was in building a culture of openness among faculty. Some noted that introducing new technologies was the most important innovation. Several highlighted the creation of a content repository as their innovation. A smaller number (3-4) made the following points: Some felt that the integration of OER into their courses was the most innovative result. Adding ancillary content was also considered progressive. Faculty becoming innovative in their pedagogy was also noted along with collaborations for the first time among faculty and librarians. Some also mentioned that their implementation of OER raised the institutions reputation for innovation in their communities.

Most institutions (8) felt that the primary benefit for faculty was the sharing of resources with(both internal and external) collaboration was a significant benefit . Many 6) reported on significant improvements in both content and teaching quality noting that OER gave them the legal, technical and pedagogical flexibility that they needed to localise, update or otherwise improve the content and their teaching. Legally, the permission to alter the content was considered to be an important improvement

over the commercial content that they could not change when needed. Technically, the OER could be ported to any device and pedagogy was improved when instructors could decide on the content and fit it to their teaching styles. Other benefits for faculty mentioned (4-5) include using OER to introduce new pedagogies, reducing the time needed for course development and the ability to adapt and change the content to suit their teaching. A few mentioned the ability to update their courses and use technology effectively, Others noted the increased time for research as OER saved them significant preparation time and resulted in increased recognition as innovators.

Student benefits focused on the significant cost savings as mentioned above. Several (4-5) felt that improvements in content quality and more innovative teaching combined with the easy access provided by OER that could be ported to different devices was an important benefit. Some (3-4) commented that because of the cost-savings of OER, students were able to remain in their courses and pass them.

Administrative benefits mentioned included the cost savings and the retention of students (which translates into increased revenues). The OER implementation also led to open policies improving the working environment for faculty and administration.

As a major challenges, some institutions reported reduced workload due to OER implementation, Others (5) suffered from work overload, primarily associated with the time needed to assess the quality of imported OER. The lack of technical expertise by faculty was also a significant challenge as was the lack of understanding of the legal issues around copyright. Also, some faculty felt it was time consuming to search out, find, and then adapt imported OER to their requirements.

The low bandwidth (or none) available at home was considered a major obstacle for students. Some felt that there was too much content in the OER courses. Others reported difficulties in citing OER, while others reported difficulties in printing out the content when needed.

A major challenge for administration was building faculty awareness of OER. They also reported on problems related to the poor infrastructure available that cause serious problems in implementation.

There was a wide variety of responses regarding the potential for OER at their institution. They reported on the potential for more cost savings and more active faculty. They felt that OER would help them to attract and retain students, but strategies and plans needed to be developed.

One university reported on using OER to support a public – private partnership with a company that specialized in testing. Another such partnership was between a community college and a private company that aided in the actual OER implementation. There was one indigenous community college that became very excited about OER and their ability to adapt the content to address their unique concerns.

These 13 implementations have provided important information of use to other institutions considering OER initiatives in the future. The case studies form part of Contact North/ContactNord's *Pockets of Innovation* series. The papers are available at

https://teachonline.ca/tools-trends/open-education-resources-oer-applications-around-world/taxonomy-term