Digital Assets at Your Fingertips: Open Educational Resources

As an instructor, it can be challenging to keep course resources fresh and engaging; however, help is available and is as near as your computer keyboard! A growing movement has emerged that provides opportunities for the creation and open sharing of learning materials and resources in a variety of digital environments. This ever-expanding collection of learning materials is referred to as *open educational resources* (OER), which the William and Flora Hewett Foundation (n.d.) defines as

> teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their use and repurposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge. (para. 2)

This is a game changer. The transformational possibilities that exist when people around the world share and have access to vast collections of teaching resources in a free, online format are endless. Higher education can truly become a global community of teachers and learners.

Several OER websites, beginning with Creative Commons in 2001 (see sidebar on page 2), provide models for open sharing and licensing of online learning resources. Participants in OER sites gain the opportunity to be both contributors and consumers of a rich collection of digital resources. The following strategies offer ways to leverage the power of OER.

Explore for Yourself

There is an ever-growing abundance of digital tools that can be used to promote learning in higher education. Part of the challenge is finding a strategy to systematically sift through this compilation to determine the best possible resources that connect with course learning outcomes and promote student learning. Fortunately, the emergence of OER provides a variety of searchable databases that can be matched with learning outcomes in virtually every academic discipline. The sidebar on page 2 presents a partial list of some OER websites, which offer materials in a variety of formats (e.g., video, audio, open textbooks, simulations, documents, open courseware).

Examine the Quality of Available Tools

After finding resources that may be compatible with course learning outcomes, instructors must then assess the tools' relative instructional value. Evaluation criteria might include the quality of explanations of the subject matter, assessment, and technological interactivity, as well as opportunities for deeper learning, As a means of

> "**Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge.**"
>
> **—Jimmy Wales, founder, Wikipedia**

advancing the importance of quality assurance in OER and to encourage users to evaluate the resources they are selecting, the website OER Commons (see sidebar) hosts a series of validated rubrics created by Achieve, a nonprofit education reform organization, to assist in this process. When an item on the OER Commons website is selected, the results of rubric-based assessments by previous users appear on the screen as a reference.

As the OER movement has grown, the quality of search tools and the quantity of available resources have expanded in dramatic ways. In response, various websites have implemented vetting processes to assure the quality of searchable items. For example, the OER website Merlot II (see sidebar) uses a curation procedure involving a collection of editorial boards and peer reviewers. Vetting, which is intended to provide a measure of quality in posted materials, will be of even greater importance as OER moves forward into the future (Porcello & Hsi, 2013).

Contribute Your Own Created Resources

In addition to being a consumer of OER, a faculty member can also be a contributor. As instructors develop instructional materials for their classes, they should consider sharing those resources with colleagues around the world though OER channels. To ensure OER are used in the manner intended by the author, the website Creative Commons (see sidebar and https://creativecommons.org/licenses) has created a licensing system that allows for six levels of use and adaptation:

- **Attribution**—Others can build on, remix, distribute, and tweak the original materials as long as they provide attribution to the original author.

- **Attribution-NoDerivs**—Materials can be distributed commercially and non-commercially with no modifications and proper attribution.

- **Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike**—Others can remix, tweak, and build upon what the author has developed, giving attribution and only using the product for noncommercial purposes.

- **Attribution-Share Alike**—Others can build on, remix, distribute, and tweak the original materials noncommercially with proper attribution.

- **Attribution-Non-Commercial**—Others can build on, remix, distribute, and tweak the original materials noncommercially with proper attribution and/or relicense the product if modifications are made.

- **Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivs**—Materials can be downloaded and shared for noncommercial purposes with no changes and with proper attribution.

These options give the original creator a range of control over the level at which materials are distributed and modified. As with any intellectual property, whether formally copyrighted or licensed through Creative Commons or another site, there is always the possibility that the developed materials and content will be taken without permission or proper attribution and/or modified in some way. This venue, however, provides an organizational structure for open sharing around the world.

As a final consideration and to engage in more student-centered learning, faculty might consider partnering with their students to create resources that could be jointly submitted for OER review and use. The process of partnering provides a great opportunity to build relationships, learn together, and deepen understanding of course content.

Visit an OER site today and find a treasure chest of teaching resources!

OER Websites

African Virtual University—http://oer.avu.org/—offers a wide variety of free webinars, courses, and workshops

Creative Commons—https://creativecommons.org/—enables the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools

Khan Academy —https://www.khanacademy.org—provides a video library with more than 9,000 videos on a variety of topics (e.g., math, art, computer programming, economics)

Merlot II—http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm— offers more than 45,000 resources and 3,000 open textbooks

OER Commons—https://www.oercommons.org/— presents more than 73,000 resources

Open Stax College—https://www.openstaxcollege.org/—offers free open source textbooks in a wide variety of disciplines (e.g., microeconomics, chemistry, psychology)

UNESCO OER Knowledge Cloud—https://oerknowledgecloud.org/—a database with a powerful search engine

References

Porcello, D., & Hsi, S. (2013). Crowdsourcing and curating online resources. Science, 341, 240-241.

The William and Flora Hewett Foundation. (n.d.). *Open educational resources*. Retrieved January 28, 2016, from http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education/open-educationalresources

What's Happening at The National Resource Center

Conferences and Continuing Education

Conferences and Institutes

Save the Dates

Institute on Sophomore Student Success

April 22-24, 2016
University of South Carolina
Columbia, South Carolina

Sophomore students have typically be the overlooked "middle-children" in higher education. With increasing awareness of second-year struggles, what resources and support can be provided to stabilize the sophomore year? The Institute on Sophomore Student Success will allow attendees the opportunity to examine trends and practices connected to building a comprehensive and intentional approach to ensure the success of sophomore students. Individual sessions are designed to build on one another so that participants leave with a personalized action plan for use on their home campuses. Institute faculty will employ group work, problem solving, case studies, discussion, and other active strategies to engage participants in learning.

Online Courses

The National Resource Center offers online courses on topics of interest in higher education. The courses provide participants the same content and opportunities for interaction with peers and the instructor as traditional (i.e., classroom-based) learning environments while taking advantage of pedagogy and teaching techniques that are not possible or common in those settings. The courses use tools such as e-mail, threaded discussions or forums, listservs, and blogs. Enrollment is limited to 25 participants, and attendees will earn 1.5 continuing education units for each course. Visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/oc for more information.

Online Course Offerings

Infusing Emotional Intelligence Learning Into Your First-Year Seminar and First-Year Experience Programs

April 4-29, 2016
Facilitated by Korrel Kanoy, Professor Emeritus, William Peace University

This course will provide an overview of relevant literature related to first-year students and Emotional Intelligence; resources and strategies for teaching emotional intelligence skills—including sample syllabi, activities, readings, and more—that you will be able to use immediately; and a section on gaining buy-in on your campus.

Who Are Our Veteran Students and Are We Veteran Friendly?

May 30-June 24, 2016
Facilitated by David DiRamio, Associate Professor, Auburn University

In this online course, we will examine the phenomenon of the veteran student in college by integrating best practices, findings from the research literature, and empirically established theories. The course is designed to inform and engage those who provide campus programs and services for veteran students, as well as others in the higher education and student affairs community.

2016 ACPA Student Affairs Assessment Institute

June 21 - 24, 2016
Charlotte, NC

In partnership with the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition
Look for some new and unique programming this year!

Visit **www.myacpa.org** for more information and to register.

Publications—Call for Case Studies

What Makes the First-Year Seminar High-Impact? An Exploration of Effective Educational Practices

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina invites you to contribute to a new book on high-impact educational practices in the first-year seminar. We are seeking high-quality case studies describing first-year seminars that intentionally integrate practices or assignments demonstrating two or more of the characteristics of effective educational practices identified by Kuh and O'Donnell (2013):

- expectations set at appropriately high levels,
- significant investment of time and effort,
- interactions with faculty and peers,
- experiences with diversity,
- frequent and constructive feedback,
- periodic and structured opportunities for reflection and integration,
- relevance through real-world applications, and/or
- public demonstration of competence.

Cases are sought from a variety of institutions (e.g., public and private; two-year and four-year; large and small) and representing a range of seminar types (e.g., extended orientation, academic, discipline-specific, basic study skills, hybrid). Successful proposals will include a detailed description of how these characteristics are enacted within classroom practices and assignments as well as their impact on the seminar's effectiveness. The deadline for case submission is **April 4, 2016**. To review complete case guidelines or submit a case study, visit http://www.sc.edu/fye/publications/development.html.

National Resource Center Exhibits and Presentations

Like many of you, the staff of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition is actively involved in the conference circuit. We are pleased to share the following upcoming opportunities to hear about the results of research studies conducted by the Center, learn about best practices, and meet National Resource Center staff members.

An Evidence-Based Discussion of Integrating High-Impact Transition Programs in the First and Second College Years. Presentation by Dallin George Young, National Resource Center Assistant Director for Research, Grants, and Assessment, at the JNGI Gateway Course Experience Conference; April 3-5, 2016; Grand Hyatt Atlanta in Buckhead; Atlanta, Georgia.

Research

The National Resource Center is currently conducting the third administration of the National Survey of Senior Capstone Experiences. Invitations to participate are being sent to chief academic, executive, and student affairs officers on campuses between March and May 2016. If you coordinate a program-based senior-year experience, culminating experience, or capstone program or course on your campus, please reach out to encourage participation and to ensure your endeavors are included in this national data collection effort.

Awards and Recognition

AOFYE–National Resource Center

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in partnership with the ACPA Commission for Admissions, Orientation, and First-Year Experience (AOFYE) are pleased to name **Amber Manning-Oueette** as the recipient of the 2016 AOFYE-National Resource Center Research Grant. Her study, entitled "A WiSE Approach: How Service-Learning Affects First-Year STEM Women," examines the experiences of STEM women participating in a service-learning project during a first-year leadership development course comprising student leaders, peer mentors, and women in science and engineering (WiSE) students at a large, public university in the Midwest. The research provides insight into how WiSE students understand and benefit from a service-learning experience and how it influences their perceptions of leadership and the university in the first-year of college. Through the campus leadership course, WiSE students found an increased sense of community, connection to the university, and identity as a leader on the campus. These important developments are associated with student retention as underrepresented populations at the university. The grant carries a $500 award, and Manning Ouellette was recognized at the AOFYE general meeting during the ACPA annual convention in Montreal, Canada.

35th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience Updates

Jordan Smith Undergraduate Student Fellowships (See photo to the right)

Each year, the National Resource Center awards up to five fellowships to undergraduate students, supporting their participation in the Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience. The purpose of the Fellowship Program is to advance the leadership skills and knowledge base of undergraduate students so that they may use what they learn at the conference to enhance and encourage first-year student development on their respective campuses.

2016 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates (See photo to the right)

The National Resource Center and Cengage Learning announced the 10 educators who were selected as the 2016 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates at the 35th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience in Orlando, Florida. These educators share a common goal of improving the educational experience for entering college students. They have been awarded this distinction for their exceptional work on behalf of first-year students and for the impact their efforts have on the students and culture of their institutions.

Excellence in Teaching First-Year Seminars Award

Sponsored by McGraw-Hill Higher Education and The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, University of South Carolina, the award is given to an instructor who has achieved great success in teaching first-year seminars and who inspires student learning, development, and success. This year, the award was presented to **Christine Harrington**, professor in the Department of History and Social Science at Middlesex County College. A dedicated instructor who serves in many roles, in addition to holding a full-time teaching position within the psychology department, she serves the director of the Center for the Enrichment of Learning and Teaching and the coordinator for Education and Student Success Programs. Harrington builds academic resilience in her students by helping them develop the skills, mindset, and support system needed to persevere even in the face of challenging and negative academic experiences. She emphasizes that mistakes are learning opportunities and sets her students up for successful outcomes through intentional and impactful assignments. She also increased the academic rigor of the campus's first-year seminar, rooted in her belief that getting students to engage in higher level cognitive tasks in their first year is a main factor in their success. Harrington serves in a mentoring role, challenging and guiding students on their journey toward their goals.

Award Recipients

Jordan Smith Undergraduate Student Fellowship

Left to right: Dustin Roberts (The National Resource Center for The FYE & SIT), Kelly Spencer (Arizona State University), Nikki Buhrdorf (Colorado State University) Kayla Johnson (Washburn University), Alyssa Frankowski (Madonna University), Kristopher Castro (Temple University), Dr. Jennifer Keup (The National Resource Center for The FYE & SIT)

2016 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates

Left to right: Gerald Poe (Wilberforce University), Marnell Alexis Stephens (MacCormac College), Nancy KingSanders (Texas A&M University), Christopher Caplinger (Georgia Southern University), Dr. Jennifer Keup (Director, The National Resource Center for The FYE & SIT), Dante Cantu (State University of New York at New Paltz), Erin Kimura-Walsh (Santa Clara University), Patsy Fischer (Seward County Community College/ Area Technical School), Jennifer Daniels (Lyon College), Sonia Maria Gipson Rankin (University of New Mexico), Brenda Sanders Dede (Clarion University), Nina Glisson (Assistant Director for Conferences and Continuing Education, The National Resource Center for The FYE & SIT)