

## **Librarians and OER: Cultivating a Community of Practice to be more Effective Advocates**

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### **Abstract**

As the costs of scholarly and educational publications skyrocket, open educational resources (OER) are becoming an important way to provide content and enhance the teaching and learning experience. Librarians have a key role to play in developing, advocating, and managing OER. For many librarians, however, championing OERs means adding an additional responsibility to their already heavy workloads, which may be overwhelming. This article describes how a grassroots group of academic librarians in British Columbia, Canada joined together as a community of practice to learn and to share ideas, strategies, and tools to support the use of OER. The BCOER Librarians focus on the education and professional development of librarians to help facilitate the use and development of OERs and to create authoritative and sustainable resources to support librarians in OER-related interactions with faculty.

### **Introduction**

With the ever increasing cost of scholarly and educational publications, open educational resources (OER) are becoming an important method of providing access to quality information and of enhancing the teaching and learning experience for both faculty and students. Yet many faculty encounter barriers to discovering, evaluating, adapting, and disseminating OER. These challenges have provided a new and exciting role for academic librarians, who are well positioned to participate in the development, description, management, and distribution of OER, as well as in advocating for and supporting their use. Many academic librarians have spearheaded programs to support the adoption and production of OER at their institutions. In many places, these services mean taking on new roles without relinquishing any other responsibilities. Some librarians may choose not to take on this new role if they feel overwhelmed or unable to devote sufficient time to create or sustain anything more, thus missing an opportunity to provide an important service at their institution and to broaden their own professional expertise. One way to provide service sustainably is to share time and resources through collaborative efforts such as a community of practice. The BCOER Librarians are a group of librarians in British Columbia that have come together and emerged as a successful community of practice on librarians and OER. Collectively, they are increasing their knowledge, interest, and expertise in open education not only with each other, but also with others interested

in supporting open education in a sustainable way by sharing ideas, tools, and strategies for promoting and supporting OER. This article will describe how a community of practice is an effective way for librarians to become successful OER advocates.

## **Open Educational Resources**

The open education movement is based on the view that “knowledge is a public good” and the internet is an effective and efficient way to share knowledge (Smith & Casserly, 2006). It seeks to broaden educational opportunities by using the internet to allow rapid and free dissemination and to enable people from around the world to access knowledge, to connect, and to collaborate. Open educational resources (OER) are a key part of this movement.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation provides a popular definition of OER:

OER are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. Open educational resources include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

In other words, they are educational materials that are either in the public domain or have been licensed under an open copyright license such as Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org/>) so that they are not only freely accessible, but also permits people to engage in the “5Rs of Openness”: retain, reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute (Wiley, 2014).

There are many factors that drive faculty to participate in the open education movement and to use OER in their courses. Motivations may include leveraging the internet to freely share educational resources with the world, making education more affordable and accessible to students, and revising content freely and legally to control their courses and textbooks in new and innovative ways (Wiley & Green, 2012). OER also have advantages for distance learners (Hatzipanagos & Gregson, 2015). Because of their open and online nature, OER can provide campus and distance learners with the same level of access to and engagement with course materials. The rapid rise of textbook costs over the past twenty years, which has placed a heavier and heavier financial burden on students, is another important impetus for the rise of OER. Between 2002 and 2012, new textbook prices rose 82 percent (United States General Accountability Office, 2013), which was approximately three times the rate of inflation. The high cost of textbooks and related fees are leading students to find other means of obtaining course texts (including sharing or pirating them) or to simply choose not to purchase them at all. In some cases, a lack of affordable course texts leads some students to be unable to complete their postsecondary studies (Raschke & Shanks, 2011). Because of their free and open nature, OER are a possible solution to the textbook affordability crisis by making education more affordable to students. It is not just faculty, students, and librarians that see the benefits of OER. Indeed, governments are encouraging the use and development of open textbooks and other OER. In Canada, the Premiers of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan signed a *Memorandum of Understanding on Open Education Resources (OER)* in March 2014 in which

the three provinces agreed to collaborate on open textbook initiatives (Alberta Ministry of Innovation and Advanced Education, British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, & Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education, 2014). States such as California, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington have also passed state bills supporting open textbooks (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition, n.d.). The U.S. Federal Government's new Open Government National Action Plan also includes commitments to expand access to OER (Open Government Partnership, 2015).

Despite the benefits of OER and the growing support for their use by many different stakeholders, there are barriers to faculty adopting them in their courses. Some of the obstacles include concerns about the quality of OER and how the adoption of OER could impact faculty promotion and tenure. However, two of the key obstacles seem to be the lack of awareness of and/or difficulty in finding suitable resources (Walz, 2015; Clobridge, 2015). These challenges are not surprising because there is not only an overwhelming abundance of both the quantity and the variety of formats of information that are available today, but also an ever increasing profusion of tools to create and access information (Shank & Bell, 2011). This proliferation of online tools and information makes the adoption of OER even more intimidating for faculty.

### **Librarians and OER**

To reduce the barriers to OER adoption, faculty require additional support from inside their institutions. Academic librarians are ideally suited to help navigate the OER world and to address some of these challenges by leading, supporting, and collaborating in OER initiatives with OER adopters and authors. As Staley and Malenfant commented in the Association of College and Research Library's *Futures Thinking for Academic Librarians: Higher Education in 2025* (2010), "This is an excellent opportunity for libraries to prove their worth as information collectors, organizers and evaluators" (p. 10). Existing library values, relationships, capacities, and infrastructure are complementary to OER support (Walz, 2015; Kazakoff-Lane, 2014). Their long-term philosophical support for "access" to information, their existing relationships with both faculty and students, and their outreach and instructional support experience make librarians a natural partner in OER initiatives and a potentially powerful voice for more affordable learning resources (Okamoto, 2013; Mitchell & Chu, 2014). Librarians may play many roles in the OER movement, including:

- using outreach skills to advocate and promote OER;
- providing strategies to find and evaluate current, relevant, and high quality OER;
- maintaining subject-based guides to find resources;
- providing long-term stable access to OER via institutional repositories;
- leveraging metadata, indexing, and classification skills to enhance access;
- adapting copyright expertise to help manage intellectual property rights and promote open licensing;
- facilitating the curation and creation of OER (Gema Bueno-de-la-Fuente, Robertson, & Boon, 2012; Kazakoff-Lane, 2014; Kleymeer, Kleinman, & Hanss, 2010; Robertson, 2010).

Librarians not only excel at finding, evaluating, and organizing resources, they are also early adopters of technology (Allen, Bell, & Billings, 2014). Distance librarians in particular have a long history of keeping pace with technological trends related to online learning and building the skills and knowledge required to support its needs and demands (Cassner & Adams, 2012). This experience makes an active role in OERs to be a natural fit for distance librarians. In short, academic libraries have the philosophy, competencies, relationships, and strengths to support, promote, and even cultivate and create OER.

Many academic librarians have seized the opportunity to spearhead programs to support the adoption and production of OERs at their institutions. For example, Arizona State University, Shoreline College, Washtenaw Community College, and Tidewater Community College have incorporated OER support into their portfolio of programs. By creating LibGuides and websites about OER and open textbooks and by providing resources to help faculty to find OER to use in their courses, librarians are providing faculty with the tools they need to help them successfully integrate OER into their courses. In fact, some libraries have taken OER support a step further; the libraries at institutions such as Kansas State University, Temple University, and Oregon State University are participating in the development and publishing of open textbooks (Walz, 2015; Bell, 2015; Clobridge, 2015). Thus, as these examples demonstrate, librarians are taking an increasingly active role in the OER movement at their institutions.

While the OER movement provides a wonderful opportunity for librarians to expand into new and exciting roles, there are also stumbling blocks which must be considered. One of the central barriers facing academic librarians is that new technologies are emerging “with faster speed and power to transform the academic library and the role of the academic librarian” (Shank & Bell, 2011, p. 105). Over the past two decades, libraries have faced enormous changes brought on by the advance of the internet and web technology. To remain relevant to a changing society, the services and resources offered by academic libraries have had to constantly evolve to meet the changing needs of a wide variety of users. The growing demand for online learning has had a particular impact on libraries, forcing them to evaluate, change, and add services (Corbett & Brown, 2015). According to the *NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Higher Education Edition*, some of the key trends impacting higher education include advancing cultures of change and innovation, cross institutional collaboration, and the proliferation of OER (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015a). These trends, as well as the those identified in the *NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Library Edition*, will have a huge impact on academic libraries now and into the future, making it even more critical for librarians to look more closely at how learning and new knowledge can be more easily and quickly shared (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015b).

Academic librarians need to find ways to rapidly and dynamically learn not only what is new and emerging in their field, but also what is new in higher education teaching and learning as a whole. As Cassner and Adams (2012) observed, “librarians need to develop new skills and competencies to reflect changing user expectations and shape the future of higher education and society” (p. 128). In today’s world, librarians need to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to employ new digital technologies and information formats and to be able to evolve as they change. Academic librarians must also blend these skills and knowledge to partner with faculty

and students and to develop new services and relationships. To take on OER-related roles, librarians need to learn the language and culture of open education, developing their expertise in areas such as open licensing, e-learning, and knowledge about OER technologies and standards (Gema Bueno-de-la-Fuente, Robertson, & Boon, 2012). In this situation, librarians involved in distance and online learning have an advantage over other academic librarians as they are often more familiar with e-learning issues. In addition to learning about the culture of OER, librarians also need to learn about the existing OER tools and resources. For example, repositories such as MERLOT ([www.merlot.org](http://www.merlot.org)), OER Commons ([www.oercommons.org](http://www.oercommons.org)), and JORUM ([www.jorum.ac.uk](http://www.jorum.ac.uk)) have different search interfaces and use different search operators. Knowing the scope of the various repositories and how to search them effectively is an important skill. Librarians then need to find or build existing tools such as guides, assessment rubrics, and promotional material to help faculty use OER.

Time is another challenge that librarians face in taking on OER responsibilities. Like many professionals, including faculty, librarians have multiple demands on their time and often manage multiple spheres simultaneously. Indeed, as Dewan (2014) notes, job descriptions for librarians often include the ability to manage a diverse workload as a position requirement. In many organizations, librarians often take on new roles without relinquishing any of their other responsibilities. In these situations, it would be a challenge to find the time not only to learn about OER, but also to provide effective help to faculty interested in engaging more with them. Some people may enthusiastically create new guides or services, only to falter when the first flush of “newness” is gone and other responsibilities become more pressing. Carefully built library guides may become stagnant and outdated. Half-finished “tools” may languish on the desktop, waiting for a flash of inspiration or a moment of time to continue working on them. Or, feeling overwhelmed and fearing that they will not have time to create or sustain anything more, librarians may choose not to undertake a new role, losing an opportunity to provide a needed service to their institution and to broaden their own professional expertise. Ultimately, a heavy and diverse workload may mean that having the opportunity to learn about and become an OER advocate may seem overwhelming to some librarians.

Indeed, the challenge of constantly changing technology, multiple responsibilities, and evolving roles may create a barrier for librarians who are interested in learning more about OER and becoming more involved in championing them at their institutions. As Brown, Wolski, and Richardson (2015) observed, “The leap from theory into practice ... [needs] to be underpinned by a skills development program, a mentor/coach, and a support network of specialists” (p. 229). In other words, there is a critical need for informal training, mentoring, and support networks as librarians move into new roles. A community of practice where fellow librarians can provide this needed training, mentoring, and support is one way of making the transition from theory into practice more manageable.

### **Communities of Practice**

A community of practice (CoP) is a well-known framework for collaborative learning that has been implemented in a wide range of educational and institutional settings to contribute to individual, organizational, and social development (Churchman & Stehlik, 2007). It may be

described as a network of people with common interests that emerges to learn from one another and to share their knowledge, expertise, and tools on an ongoing basis in order to develop better solutions to problems or challenges (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Participants share information and ideas, discuss common issues, produce tools and documents, and develop personal relationships. A CoP can accelerate the sharing or flow of knowledge by acting as learning spaces where people can share their knowledge and experience with their peers and learn from one another, thus fostering innovation and creative problem-solving (Burk, 2000). As trust and relationships build within the group, members become increasingly engaged and are more likely to share their knowledge with each other (Crosby, 2014). The process of sharing information and experiences with the group helps the members to learn from each other and gives them the opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally.

There are three elements of a community of practice: domain, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). It has an identity that is defined by a shared domain of interest. Brought together by a shared learning need, the CoP may emerge spontaneously because of the members' common interest in a particular area or it may be created specifically with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a particular field (Lave & Wenger, 1991). By pursuing their interest in the domain, members engage in joint activities, have discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other, but they do not need to work together on a daily basis. The key is that they interact and learn together. CoP members develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems. In other words, they create a shared practice. The combination of these three elements constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three components in parallel that one cultivates a community.

As academia has become more focused on interdisciplinarity and collaboration, librarians have begun to participate in various communities of practice within and beyond their own institutions. A CoP is both a strategic approach to knowledge sharing and an innovative way to foster learning. Kim (2015) observes that CoPs may be an effective way for libraries to take on more active roles in knowledge sharing and collaborative learning to support the knowledge activities of people in a knowledge society. Indeed, the tools created in a community of practice are not only a way to share knowledge, but also a means of reducing costs because they lessens the duplication of efforts. Moreover, CoPs provide a place for professional socialization; they help members to exchange ideas with colleagues, to build their own professional identity, to create a sense of connectedness, and to offer an informal form of apprenticeship for new members. When successful, a CoP can elicit new ideas and solutions which may lead to innovation in the profession. They also benefit the individual members by having an opportunity not only to work with and learn from knowledgeable colleagues, but also to build one's own professional reputation (Henrich & Attebury, 2010). Churchman and Stehlik (2007) noted that during situations of extreme change, communities of practice "may be attractive to members seeking to make meaning or sense of their situation and ways in which to negotiate their professional identity in the new context" (p. 272). With the proliferation of open education and its impact on the role of librarians, a community of practice is an effective way for librarians to learn, to share knowledge, and to develop resources that may be used by anyone.

## **BCOER Librarians as a Community of Practice**

The BCOER Librarians is a grassroots group of postsecondary librarians in British Columbia (B.C.), Canada who are working together to discover and share ways to support the use of quality OER by faculty and students. Having a common interest in OER, the group has built a community and has developed and shared activities, experiences, tools, and resources to advance their learning and that of others interested in open education. As a group that shares, develops, and diffuses learning, knowledge, and practice, the BCOER Librarians fit the definition of a community of practice. The emergence of the group is a natural development seeded by B.C.'s strong history of collaborative library efforts and interest in open education.

The academic libraries of British Columbia have a long record of successful collaborations through the work of active consortial groups, including the British Columbia Electronic Library Network (<http://www.eln.bc.ca/>), e-HLbc (<http://ehlbc.ca/>), and COPPUL (<http://www.coppul.ca/>). While these groups formed to facilitate consortial purchasing of electronic resources for their member organizations, each group has also undertaken other collaborative efforts over the years which have set the stage for the BCOER Librarians. Examples of these initiatives include developing and maintaining provincial union databases, running a shared virtual reference system (<http://askaway.org>), and creating a distributed retrospective print repository program (<http://coppul.ca/programs/shared-print>). These efforts have enabled librarians from across the province to make connections and work together on projects. Some members of the BCOER Librarians have worked together in the past on consortial-related endeavors, which has helped to facilitate the building of trust and relationships in the community of practice.

British Columbia also has a strong interest in open education, led by BCcampus (<http://bccampus.ca/>). Funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, BCcampus supports the teaching, learning, and educational work of the BC postsecondary system by coordinating pan-institutional collaborative projects and by introducing and supporting innovations in teaching, learning, and educational technology. Their three primary service areas are open education, collaborative programs and services, and student data services. One of its major initiatives is the B.C. Open Textbook Project, which aims to increase access to higher education by reducing student cost, giving faculty more flexibility, and improving learning outcomes (<http://open.bccampus.ca>). The Ministry has funded the project to provide free, openly licensed textbooks in each of the top forty highest enrolled subject areas and in selected skills training and technical programs. British Columbia is the first province in Canada to work on this type of project (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation, and Technology, 2012). As of November 2015, there are 134 open textbooks in the B.C. Open Textbook Collection and 294 known open textbook adoptions. There have been 115 peer reviews of textbooks in the collection involving 21 institutions and 83 reviewers. Eighteen institutions in British Columbia have adopted textbooks from the collection. Savings for B.C. postsecondary students have been in excess of \$900,000 (CAD) (BCcampus, 2015b; A. Coolidge, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

The increasing availability of open textbooks and the growing interest in OER in the B.C. postsecondary system provided the impetus for the BCOER Librarians. British Columbia librarians involved in higher education began to consider how they could collectively tackle the challenge of how to assist faculty and students with finding high quality OER. In Fall 2013, a few librarians decided that it would be helpful to meet and share ideas, tools, and strategies on OER projects in support of faculty. Although B.C. had a growing interest in and much activity related to open education, particularly regarding open textbooks, few in higher education were addressing how to assist faculty with the discovery and use of quality OER. This informal discussion led to an exploratory teleconference meeting in December 2013, in which a small group of librarians decided to take the lead in developing more OER expertise. The group agreed to work together to address not only how to improve faculty awareness and knowledge of OER, but also their own ongoing professional learning in this area (BCcampus, 2015a). The group began meeting regularly, and named themselves the BCOER Librarians.

As of November 2015, there are 18 librarians from 12 B.C. public postsecondary institutions in the community of practice. Participating librarians come from larger institutions (e.g., University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Victoria), teaching focused universities (University of the Fraser Valley, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, and Thompson Rivers University), technical institutes (British Columbia Institute of Technology), two year community colleges (Douglas College and Camosun College), and cognate organizations such as BCcampus and the Public Knowledge Project (PKP). Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) students from the University of British Columbia iSchool also participate on projects. Most members are from the Metro Vancouver area, but some are from other parts of the province, including Vancouver Island and the Southern Interior (e.g., Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C.). To date, membership numbers in the group have fluctuated, as participation is interest driven and voluntary. As is the nature of a community of practice, members will only participate if the group is meeting their individual needs for sharing and learning with each other (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

### **Activities of the BCOER Librarians**

Supported by BCcampus, the BCOER Librarians have been very active in the two years since its formation. The group meets for monthly teleconferences and uses a listserv for posting questions, sharing information, and organizing meetings. Two wikis are used: one for team plans and notes (<http://bcoerguides.pbworks.com>) and the other (<http://bccampus.mediawiki.com/bcoer>) for collaborative projects. There is also a public-facing website hosted by BCcampus for wider sharing of information and resources: <http://open.bccampus.ca/bcoer-librarians>. To date, BCOER Librarians have organized two hackfests, created multiple tools, held an OER Awareness event for librarians, and participated in numerous outreach activities such as webinars and conferences.

### **Hackfests**

Energized by the B.C. Open Textbook Summit keynote by Quill West on librarians and OER leadership in April 2014, a dozen people, including members of the BCOER Librarians and



MLIS students from the University of British Columbia's iSchool, gathered for a hackfest in May 2014 (BCcampus, 2014). Its success led the group to hold a second hackfest in July 2015.

Derived from the coding/programmer community, a hackfest (or "hackathon") is a focused hands-on event which provides an unique opportunity for people to gather in a semi-structured way in order to concentrate on resolving particular problems as suggested by the attendees (Popowich, 2014). It comprises several elements: intense collaboration, playful exploration, and the freedom to work on what one wants with an end product in mind. A key component of a hackfest is to be away from day-to-day responsibilities in order to dedicate time to projects.

Prior to both hackfests, the members of the BCOER Librarians posted project ideas in a shared Google document to crowdsource ideas relating to current needs and to identify potential joint projects. At the beginning of each event, the group reviewed the list and chose the projects that would be tackled based on the interest of the hackfest attendees. Participants then self-organized into working groups and devoted the rest of the day to working on the identified projects.

The May 2014 hackfest had two OER working groups emerge: a subject guides group and an awareness group. The former worked on testing a rubric to assess OER repositories with the aim of creating OER subject guides. By the end of the day, 31 OER Science repository resources were successfully reviewed and ranked. The awareness group focused on developing advocacy tools that librarians could use to promote OER at their institutions. They created a poster presenting key talking points to engage faculty in discussions about OERs and open textbooks (Lee, 2014b).

The ability to meet and work together in person at the first hackfest allowed the BCOER Librarians to establish a good working rapport and to set a direction for future activities. It was also a very good learning experience as attendees got a better sense of what could be accomplished in a half day of intense, concentrated work. The participants had originally hoped to complete a set of fully developed OER guides and a finished poster, but realized that much more time would have been required to achieve those goals. The group also learned that additional expertise outside of the hackfest time would be needed to complete their projects. For example, the help of a graphic artist would be required to finish the advocacy poster. All in all, the first hackfest experience demonstrated that it takes a considerable amount of time to navigate the OER world on the web and to curate quality resources. It also reaffirmed that the work is made much easier and effective through collaboration (Lee, 2014b).

For the second hackfest in July 2015, the BCOER Librarians encouraged participants to invite fellow librarians to attend, which brought a new and very active member to the team. The attendees decided to focus on two projects: 1) drafting a strategic planning guide for libraries on OER; and 2) working with the BCOER MediaWiki site to explore and possibly define workflows, content organization, and functionality for the group's work. Timing was ripe for a strategy planning guide, as interest in OER and open textbooks has been steadily growing in B.C. and libraries are receiving more inquiries for OER help from faculty. Working on developing

more expertise using the MediaWiki site was a priority project given the group's goal to create and share more OER subject guides this year. By the end of the day, a draft strategic planning guide was completed, more content was added to the MediaWiki, and a better understanding of the site's functionality was achieved. Although participant numbers were lower than the first hackfest because some people were away on summer vacation, attendees were pleased with what they were able to accomplish with a small, but agile group and the hackfest format (Lee, 2015).

## **Advocacy Tools**

The BCOER Librarians group has been busy developing comprehensive guides and tools such as an OER repository assessment rubric, an advocacy poster, and OER guides. These resources are all OERs so that others may reuse or adapt them to suit their own needs:

<http://open.bccampus.ca/bcoer-librarians/bcoer-tools/>.

### ***OER Repository Assessment Rubric (OERR Rubric)***

<http://open.bccampus.ca/files/2014/07/OERR-Rubric.pdf>

The “OER Repository Assessment Rubric” was created by a team at the University of British Columbia (UBC) with the assistance of UBC MLIS students. It is designed to be a tool for librarians to use when evaluating OER repositories in order to ensure high quality standards in the selection of OER repositories, primarily for inclusion in BCOER guides, but also for other librarians to use for their own purposes. The rubric was developed to evaluate repositories in the following areas: authority, audience, access and diversity, user-friendliness, subject coverage, search functionality and browsing, media type, and licensing and permissions. It provides a definition for each area and offers a three level evaluation system. The rubric was rigorously tested at the May 2014 hackfest. The final version was completed and shared on the BCOER Librarians website in February 2015.

### ***OER Advocacy Poster***

<http://open.bccampus.ca/bcoer-librarians/bcoer-tools/>

An OER advocacy poster was created at the May 2014 hackfest as a tool to engage faculty in discussions about OER and open textbooks. The poster's key ideas are an overview of the “5Rs of Openness”, an explanation of what OER could be, the benefits for students, the advantages for faculty, and some statistical facts about OER. By the end of the hackfest, the poster's content and general layout had been determined, but it required some gaps to be filled, such as local B.C. statistics, graphics, and final design work. The poster was completed and shared on the BCOER Librarians website in October 2014. It was revised in April 2015 to reflect more current statistics and textbook cost savings.

### ***BCOER Guides***

<http://open.bccampus.ca/bcoer-librarians/bcoer-guides/>

In Fall 2014, a subgroup of BCOER Librarians from B.C. Institute of Technology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, and Douglas College teamed up to create three related

LibGuides: Open Education Resources Primer, Open Textbooks, and Open Education Resources by Material Type. The former provides a general introduction to OER, covering topics such as the “5Rs of Openness”, Creative Commons licences, and more information for specific audiences such as faculty, librarians, and students. The guide on open textbooks provides an introduction to open textbooks, general information about the B.C. Open Textbook Project, and offers suggestions on how to find existing open textbooks. The guide on material type has information on open data, open books, open databases, open multimedia, and open courses/MOOCs. It also links back to the guide on open textbooks. These guides have been used and adapted by BCOER member libraries such as the University of British Columbia, Thompson Rivers University, and University of the Fraser Valley, as well as by some postsecondary libraries in Atlantic Canada including Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia Community College, and St. Francis Xavier University.

### ***BCOER MediaWiki***

<http://mediawiki.bccampus.ca/index.php/Category:BCOER>

In March 2015, members of the BCOER Librarians started to experiment with using a MediaWiki (<https://www.mediawiki.org>) hosted by BCcampus for the co-creation and updating of OER subject guides (<http://open.bccampus.ca/bcoer-librarians/bcoer-guides/>). The group decided that using MediaWiki would be a more effective way to collaboratively develop and maintain OER guides than the existing LibGuide format because its embed code for content can be easily imported into other platforms. To facilitate the use of the “embed page” feature, the BCOER MediaWiki provides step-by-step instructions on how to embed content into both LibGuides and Wordpress. Another benefit of the MediaWiki is that all changes and updates made in the “master” MediaWiki site are syndicated to all sites that use the embed code, making it easier for librarians to share in the maintenance of guide content. Since MediaWiki is open source and free to use, the BCOER Librarians can potentially involve more librarians to help with the creation, maintenance, and sharing of new OER content, making this a more efficient and sustainable model for maintaining guides. As a first step and case study to see how the MediaWiki embed page feature worked, Thompson Rivers University successfully embedded the OER Primer’s content that had been created in the MediaWiki site at the July 2015 hackfest into its OER guide: <http://libguides.tru.ca/oer>.

### ***Faculty Guide for Evaluating Open Education Resources***

<http://open.bccampus.ca/files/2014/07/Faculty-Guide-22-Apr-15.pdf>

The “Faculty Guide for Evaluating Open Education Resources” is a tool for faculty to use when choosing OER at the course level. It provides a checklist of suggested questions that faculty may want to consider to ensure that they select high quality OER. The first version of the checklist was completed and posted in March 2015 by a UBC MLIS student as a project for a cooperative education placement. After feedback from members of the BCOER Librarians, it was revised and shared on the BCOER Librarians website in April 2015.

### **Professional Development Efforts**

As the BCOER Librarians' confidence in their knowledge about OER has grown, they have begun to actively share their knowledge with others outside the group. After the May 2014 hackfest, the members began to talk about methods of providing professional development for librarians and to think about seeking opportunities to share their knowledge about OER with others. They discussed possible activities such as holding an in-person OER awareness event for postsecondary librarians, running a monthly drop-in webinar to field questions on OER, creating a regional listserv for discussion on OER topics, or facilitating an online forum for inter-institutional discussions and for conversations with faculty. While not all of these suggestions have come to fruition as of yet, the group has created a listserv for internal communication, organized an in-person OER awareness event, participated in webinars, and presented at conferences such as the 2015 B.C. Library Conference and the 2015 B.C. Open Textbook Summit to promote OER and to share the group's tools, resources, and activities.

The BCOER Librarians have also provided outreach to numerous groups outside of the province such as Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) in October 2014, the Council of Atlantic University Libraries / Conseil des bibliothèques universitaires de l'Atlantique (CAUL-CBUA) in February 2015, International Open Education Week in March 2015, and Open Oregon in June 2015. They have also been invited to share their work at the annual meeting of the Alberta Association of Academic Libraries in November 2015. In addition, the BCOER Librarians have been invited to be a Country Champion by the OER World Map (<https://oerworldmap.org/>), a project funded by the Hewlett Foundation to help promote awareness of the work of OER leaders and projects around the world.

The following events are selected activities that highlight the range of activities that members of this community of practice have undertaken.

### ***B.C. Post-Secondary Community Feedback Session***

In June 2014, members of the BCOER Librarians facilitated a session at the B.C. Educational Technology Users Group (ETUG) Spring Workshop to obtain community feedback from educators. ETUG (<http://etug.ca/>) is a grassroots group of B.C. educators who are interested in teaching, learning, and educational technology. The majority of participants at the feedback session were from the postsecondary field and included instructors, librarians, instructional designers, educational technologists, and students. Participants were asked to identify what they felt were the primary challenges to using OER. The obstacles they identified included awareness about OER, discoverability, quality, resource longevity, understanding open licensing, overall resistance to change in postsecondary, and generally knowing about opportunities (ETUG spring workshop, 2014). For the BCOER Librarians, this feedback reaffirmed that the projects and plans that they currently had underway and those that they were planning for the future would help to address these challenges.

### ***OER Awareness Event: Open Education Resources: Librarians, Leadership, and Opportunity***

On October 27, 2014, a half-day event OER awareness event, *Open Education Resources: Librarians, Leadership, and Opportunity*, was held at Douglas College in New

Westminster, BC. It was a step towards helping academic librarians understand and advance their professional learning in OER. The session's topics included the open education movement in the international, national, and provincial context; OER and open textbooks in the B.C. postsecondary realm; librarians and OER leadership; and librarians working on innovative projects such as the first B.C. Open Textbook Sprint. Over 40 academic librarians from B.C. and Washington State attended. Based on anecdotal feedback from participants, the awareness event was a very helpful orientation to and discussion about OER for librarians (L. Lee, personal communication, October 29, 2014). The event was recorded and shared as a resource on the BCOER Librarians website: <http://open.bccampus.ca/bcoer-librarians/professional-learning/>.

## **Beyond OER**

The joint collaboration related to OER has motivated the members of the community of practice to work together on other “open” issues of interest to librarians. In October 2014, the BCOER Librarians co-promoted International Open Access Week by creating a webpage to share the events being held at various B.C. institutions (Lee, 2014a). A year later, for International Open Access Week 2015, the University of British Columbia Library, Simon Fraser University Library, BCcampus, the Public Knowledge Project, Council of Prairie and Pacific Libraries, and the B.C. Research Libraries Group partnered to offer an evening reception and panel event on openness in higher education. The partners shared in the planning of the event, costs for the venue, catering, and sponsorship for the live streaming and recorded webcast of the speakers.

At the ETUG Spring Workshop in June 2015, the BCOER Librarians presented a poster on how LibraryBox technology (<http://librarybox.us/>) can be used to share OER with learners in remote and rural areas without reliable internet connectivity or with learners who are otherwise unable to access the open web: [http://etug.ca/files/2015/06/LibraryBox\\_poster-01.png](http://etug.ca/files/2015/06/LibraryBox_poster-01.png). This poster is an OER, revised from a poster created by Ryerson University Library and Archives (RULA).

## **Future Considerations**

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) identify five stages of development through which a community of practice evolves: potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship, and transformation. In existence for two years, the BCOER Librarians have now emerged as a community of practice. The group has established their domain as OER and librarianship; built trust and relationships; created multiple tools and resources to share with others; and have been actively engaged in activities where the group members are learning together and sharing their knowledge. As they approach the maturation stage, an important priority will be to consider ways to showcase the value of their work. In addition, the group may also need to take on the tasks of clarifying or re-clarifying its role as a community of practice, managing its boundaries, and organizing its knowledge (Kim, 2015). Some of this work is already underway as the group plans for a new website so that the knowledge resources created by community members can be found more easily. To bring fresh ideas and life to the community, the BCOER Librarians will

also need to consider how to attract new members and to include them in events such as hackfests or through open learning spaces such as online forums or drop-in webinars.

To help with the sustainability of this CoP, it will be important for the BCOER Librarians to continue to foster a distributed leadership model so that the continuance of the community does not rely on any single member (Team BE, 2012). It is important that members take the lead in community roles such as facilitating dialogue at the monthly teleconference meetings, note-taking, and representing the BCOER Librarians and their work at meetings, events, and conferences. The group's activities need to continue to be flexible and to allow for varying degrees of participation by members so that individuals are able to contribute and engage as much or as little as they wish or are able (Attebury, Perret, Kenyon, & Green, 2013). To help with the continuity of the group's activities and work, it is crucial that notes are kept and posted in a public wiki where summary ideas and actions are readily available for all. The administrative tools provided by BCcampus' sponsorship---the group listserv, access to teleconferencing services, and meeting coordination---must be recognized as key supports enabling communication and collaboration amongst members.

As the BCOER Librarians move into their next phase as a community of practice, they will need to review their purpose and what they wish to learn and do together going into the coming year. To remain relevant, the community must be adaptable to members' changing priorities, interests and needs. The December 2015 in-person meeting of the BCOER Librarians will be an opportunity for this important discussion and planning to take place.

### **Conclusion**

Inspired by the growing open education movement in British Columbia, the members of the BCOER Librarians came together as a community of practice to increase their knowledge, interest, and expertise in OER and to share their ideas, tools, and strategies for promoting and supporting them. This article not only briefly reviewed the OER movement in higher education and the role that librarians could play in it, but also described how a community of practice could be an effective way for librarians to become effective OER advocates. The BCOER Librarians have learned that a distributed leadership, some administrative support, and being open to new members and new ideas are keys to sustaining an active group. By creating shared resources that multiple people can use and adapt, these librarians are not only practicing openness themselves, but also ensuring that they are not duplicating efforts individually. In other words, this sharing of time and resources provides service and promotes sustainability in OER advocacy. Given that one of the challenges that librarians face in promoting OER is that it is often an additional responsibility added to an already heavy and diverse workload, joining forces with others via a community of practice or using the resources that another CoP has created is a way for academic librarians to provide an important service and broaden their own professional expertise in a new and exciting area of higher education.

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