

Open Resources in Nebraska

State Colleges Lead in Providing Open Educational Materials

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Open Education has hit the education profession by storm, and Nebraska's state colleges have been quick to respond to this opportunity. Why? To reduce education costs to state college students, to work collaboratively with colleagues, and to improve upon the quality and strength of our course offerings.

Open educational resources (OER) are educational materials used for teaching, learning, research and other purposes. An OER specializes in delivering effective learning experiences to students worldwide. They also use appropriate technology to break down barriers for those with disabilities, those who are isolated, and those challenged economically. Most importantly, OER materials are free, open to the public and aim to provide access to education for all.

Anyone can develop an OER, whether it is an article, paper, presentation, learning module, course or book. Once developed, the OER is licensed (typically through the Creative Commons licensing process) and the author posts it to an online repository or library, where it becomes accessible to the public. Depending on the type of licensure the creator-author selects, an OER may be re-used, re-mixed and/or re-distributed — with the intent being that the new “re-mixed” product will also then be posted to an open site repository, thereby building and improving upon the original product. As might be expected, appropriate authorship citations are required, and the OER quality will vary from author to author.

Some examples of OER sites include The Open University, Wikipedia, YouTubeEDU and the Khan Academy. Now, Nebraska has an open online resource repository/library located at:

OpenEducationNebraska.com

At the Nebraska website you may:

- Learn how to house and/or create your own open resources and share them on the web using our tools and

guides;

- View and download existing course materials and educational resources, including lectures, syllabi, and assignments developed by other people;

- Explore the Open Resource Community and its many projects, or learn how the Nebraska state college team can support your work.

It's About Sharing

With this program, the Nebraska State College System is leading the way in open education resources at the higher education level. A February summit brought together faculty, staff and administrators from Chadron State College, Peru State College and Wayne State College. The purposes of this summit were to:

- Provide educators with a better understanding of Open Education;

- Explore how OER's might play a role in reducing the educational costs to students;

- Work collaboratively with colleagues to identify ways to improve the quality of mutual course offerings (i.e., Education & Special Education courses).

Here's the bottom line: it's about sharing. Why should anyone or any group serve to profit from educating our youth?

Potential Savings

Cable Green, a speaker at the February summit, expressed the OER advan-

tage. He claimed that, on average, most public school textbooks in this country are outdated by 18 years, even though school districts spend millions on new textbooks each year.

With “open access” one can pay institutions a fee to develop a high quality current textbook that would then be posted and made available in an open access online library — like that at the Open Education Nebraska website. The potential annual cost tax savings could be extreme, with the resulting new revenue used to offset other public education costs. Ultimately, P-12 Nebraska students will have current texts to use in all subjects, at all grade levels. The states of Utah and Washington are already moving toward this model.

As valuable as OER's might be, however, they will never take the place of teachers or schools. Since OER's are resources meant to be used for education rather than accredited educational institutions, they can neither award degrees nor provide academic or administrative support to students. This means that in order for people to get a diploma they must attend school.

So, what does this mean for teachers and educators? The impact of Open Educational Resources will grow as teachers utilize the abundant information available. OER's may help to make teachers' jobs easier, but more important they will enrich the quality and format of information provided to students in and out of the classroom.



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