# Adopting Open Educational Resources (OER): A Journey

Margaret Wan, Ph.D., MSPH, MS/HSA, LL.B. Assistant Professor, Public Health April 24, 2017

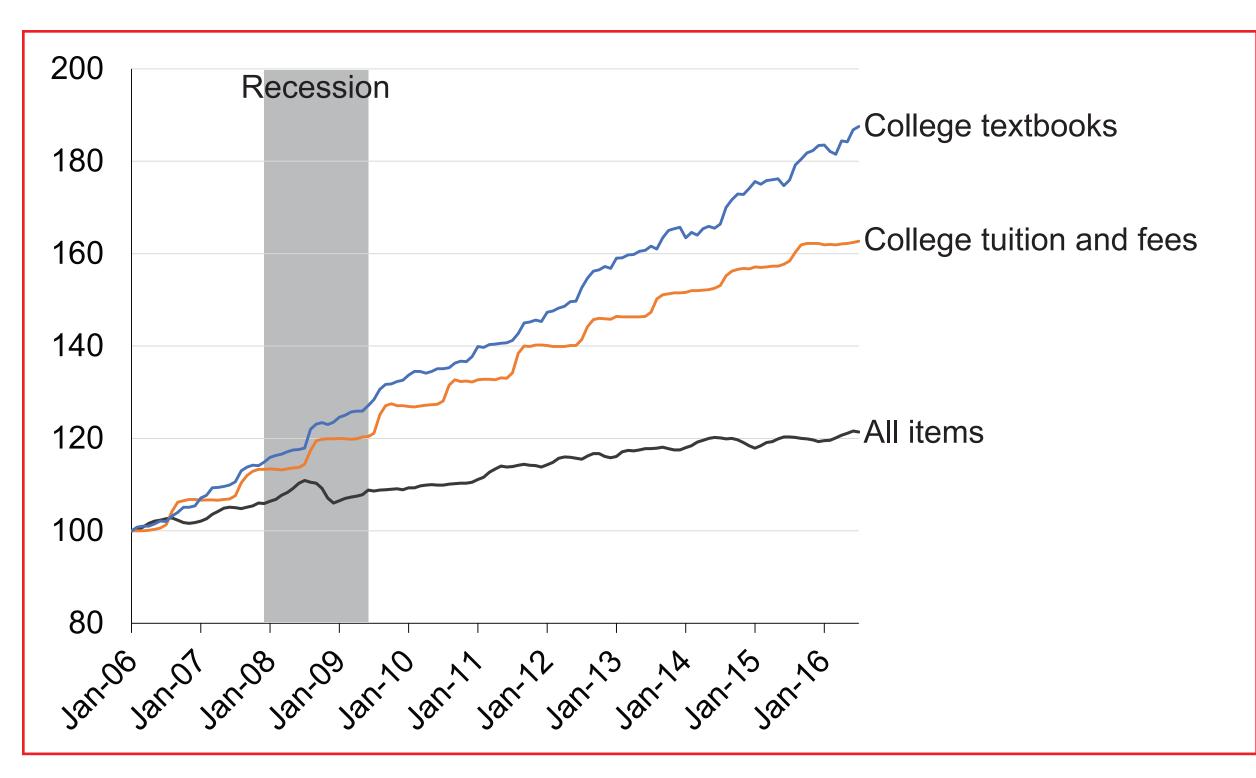
## Abstract

The "Free the Textbook" learning community at Ferris State University encourages faculty members to adopt OER for courses they teach. The process that involves identifying resources, reviewing them for quality, and determining their appropriateness for a specific course is a learning experience for participants. The experience to-date of a faculty member, along with next steps and desired outcomes, is described.

# Background

While OER has several advantages, a major reason for promoting OER is to reduce the costs of textbooks to students. These costs have skyrocketed in the 10 years between 2006 and 2016 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Consumer Price Indexes, January 2006-July 2016



Adapted from BLS (2016)

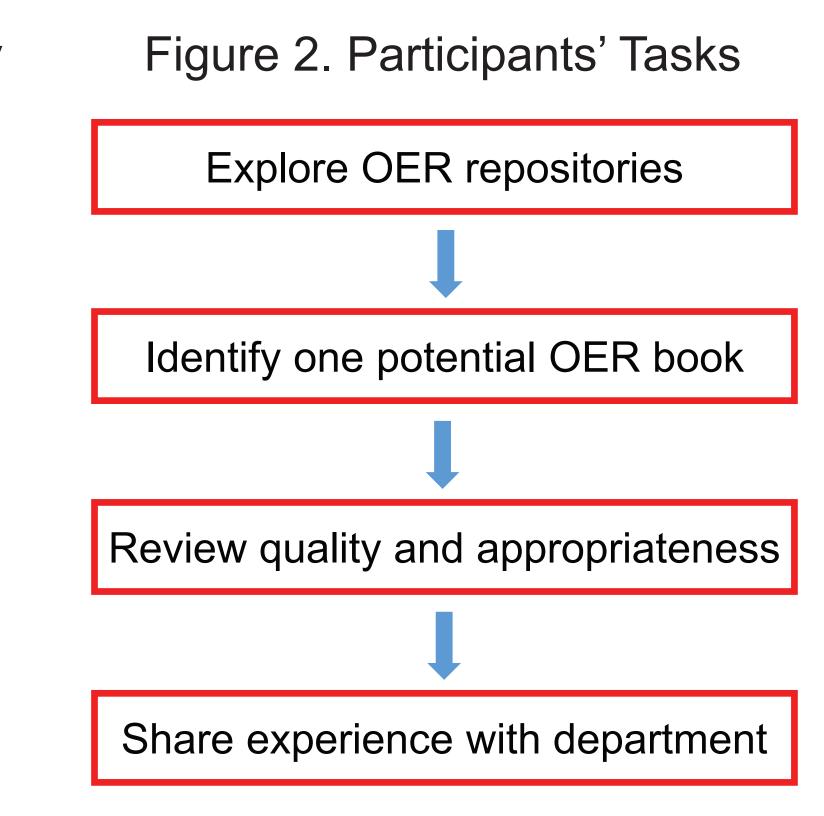
# The advantages of OER are:

- Savings on students' costs of textbooks
- ► Elimination of book orders by faculty months in advance
- Currency of information compared with traditional textbooks
- Ability to adapt and update contents anytime
- Multiple formats accommodating various user preferences
- Portability of digital materials
- Option to print hard copy if desired
- Interactive navigational links and multimedia
- Student engagement through enhanced interactivity

#### The Process

The "Free the Textbook" learning community is sponsored by the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL). It is an opportunity for faculty to gain a better understanding of the value of OER to students and faculty, explore resources available, and realize the benefits by adopting OER for a specific course.

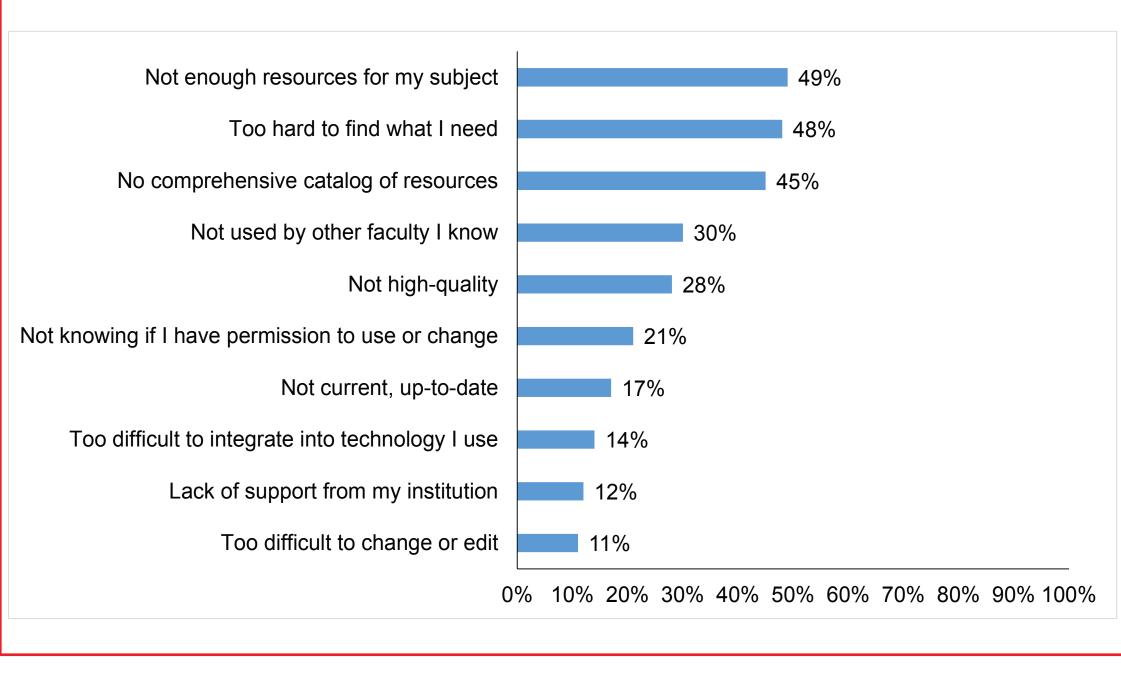
The community met approximately monthly during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. The facilitators provided information on various aspects of OER, such as licensing and repositories. Each participant would use that information to find OER materials for a course where he or she would like to replace the current textbook. The tasks performed in the Fall 2016 semester are shown in Figure 2.



### The Challenges

The major challenge is that no OER material is determined to be suitable for the author's targeted course, which is a graduate course in health communication and mass media. Such an issue is discussed by Allen and Seaman (2016), as depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Barriers to Adopting OER



Adapted from Allen and Seaman (2016)

Adopting a traditional textbook or reference book for a graduate course in health communication and mass media has been difficult.

Searching for OER materials has proved to be harder. Most OER textbooks are not written for the graduate level. It has been also extremely time-consuming to search multiple OER repositories as there is not one catalog.

# **Next Steps and Desired Outcomes**

In the Spring 2017 semester, participants divided into three tracks: (a) writing an OER text, (b) adopting an OER text, and (c) curating a course pack. The author will curate a course pack so that eventually it will replace the current textbook. The desired outcomes are:

- 1. Students will achieve the same or better learning outcomes in the course using OER materials instead of the current textbook.
- 2. Students will have access to the most up-to-date information on the topics in the course.

Accomplishment of the desired outcomes will be evaluated by examining the difference, if any, in the achievement of course learning outcomes between students using the original textbook and those using the OER objects. The comparison would be limited since (a) the students in the course in different semesters will be different and there are no controls and (b) the course already incorporates a lot of supplemental materials such as journal articles.

# Conclusion

Participation in the "Free the Textbook" learning community has been a valuable experience. Adoption of OER is a journey. For the author, this journey has just begun. As awareness and popularity of OER increase, more materials of high quality are expected to become available for both graduate and undergraduate courses.

## References

- Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2016). *Opening the textbook: Educational resources in U.S. higher education, 2015-16.* Retrieved from http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/openingthetextbook2016.pdf
- U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). (2016, August 30). College tuition and fees increase 63 percent since January 2006. *TED: The Economics Daily.* Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm

