OER Librarianship: Examining OER Librarian Work, Motivations, and Origin Stories

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abstract: As the OER movement expands in higher education, libraries are increasingly seeking to add OER librarians to their organizational charts. As an emerging subfield, OER librarianship takes many forms, and there are many paths to OER work. This study examines OER librarians' paths to the field, including their motivations for entering and remaining in the field, their day-to-day work, and the barriers that they experience. The results of this study have implications for administrators seeking to develop or sustain OER programs in their libraries and on their campuses.

Introduction

Attaining a college degree in the United States is expensive. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the average annual cost of college for undergraduates at a four-year public university is around $26,000.[1] Between 2011 and 2021, college tuition and fees alone increased by almost 33 percent.[2] To meet these costs, 38 percent of undergraduates take out student loans, and the average amount borrowed is $45,300.[3] This debt is a long-term burden for student loan borrowers; four years after graduation, borrowers still owe an average of 78 percent of their original loan balance.

In this context, even smaller expenses can accumulate and cause financial stress for college students. One of these smaller expenses is textbooks. Like tuition and fees, textbook costs have risen at a rate far outstripping the consumer price index in recent years.[4] Research has shown that the high cost of textbooks is affecting the educational experience, with as many as two-thirds of students choosing to forego purchasing

required course materials.[5] One increasingly popular solution to the challenge of high textbook costs has been open educational resources, or OER. OER textbooks are similar to commercial textbooks in many ways; both types of textbooks are written by faculty experts in the field and are typically reviewed by other experts. OER textbooks are unique, however, because they are licensed by their authors so they can be reused, redistributed, and even revised by others at no cost. This means that faculty can use OER textbooks in their courses at no cost to themselves or to students.

Students and faculty struggling to manage the burden of textbook costs commonly turn to their campus libraries, which often have textbook reserves programs to provide students with short-term access to textbooks. Though useful, textbook reserves programs have limitations; for example, students must share textbook access with classmates, fines can be steep for financially disadvantaged students, and students can only keep the textbooks for a short period of time (typically a few hours). Further, libraries are facing the same textbook price increases as students; libraries cannot afford to provide access to every textbook needed. To help manage these challenges, librarians have become leaders in the effort to switch to OER textbooks.

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This qualitative study examines the motivations of librarians for becoming involved in the burgeoning OER textbook movement. It explores how librarians found themselves in their roles, the work entailed by those roles, the motivations that drive their work, and the ways that those motivations have shifted over the course of their time in their positions. By understanding the motivations behind OER work, administrators can better support their OER librarians by recognizing transferable skills, crafting well-designed position descriptions, and providing appropriate professional development.

Literature Review

Although open access to education has been discussed for many years, the term open educational resources (OER) is much more recent, dating back to UNESCO's Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Education in Developing Countries in 2002.[6] Since that time, the Open Educational Resources movement has grown exponentially. Noteworthy OER developments have included the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's OpenCourseWare project, Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), and Khan Academy.[7] One type of OER that has received particular attention is open textbooks. Projects such as OpenStax at Rice University, British Columbia's BC Open Textbook Project, the Open Textbook Library at the University of Minnesota, and many others have saved students millions of dollars in textbook costs.[8]

OER advocates soon recognized the potential for librarians to be leaders in the OER movement. Librarians, advocates argued, could "have the power to influence the

creation, the ongoing availability, the perception of credibility, and the adoption and use of OERs."[9] And, indeed, librarians have been identified as key players in the OER movement due to their existing campus relationships as well as their adjacent skill sets in areas such as resource selection, cataloging, and copyright.[10] On many campuses, librarians are the cornerstone of campus OER efforts. Librarians host outreach events to raise awareness about OER.[11] They run OER-related grant programs.[12] They even manage OER publishing platforms.[13]

Many libraries have embraced the OER movement, recognizing OER as an issue that can raise their campus profile. Robin Colson, Elijah Scott, and Robin Donaldson argue that "library support for OER adoption helps to establish the value of libraries within the institution."[14] However, librarians have also expressed concerns about workload, training, and the addition of new responsibilities. For example, Bryan McGeary, Christopher Guder, and Ashwini Ganeshan and also Kate McNally Carter and Ariana Santiago advocate for OER models that are sustainable in terms of labor.[15] Other librarians have more specific concerns about skill sets; Lindsey Gumb cautions that many librarians are unprepared to handle the complex copyright issues that arise in the midst of OER work.[16]

Although several librarians have written case studies about their own work with OER, there is little research into the specific work of OER librarians. In one notable exception, Amanda Larson examined job postings for OER librarians to identify common organizational reporting lines and responsibilities, and found that there is considerable variation in both areas.[17] Dr. Braddlee and Amy VanScoy explored faculty perceptions of librarians' role in OER development and found that faculty commonly believed that librarians' contribution to the OER movement should be in areas traditionally related to librarianship, such as discovery, rather than in areas such as policymaking and textbook development.[18] Mary Jo Orzech and Samuel J. Abramovich found that librarians shared this opinion, ranking assistance with discovery and providing workshops and LibGuides as the most important OER-related tasks for librarians.[19] Despite agreement between librarians and faculty on OER librarian roles, the body of literature explored here reveals that many OER librarians have a much broader scope of work.

Existing contributions to the literature have helped to further the conversation about librarians and OER work. However, questions remain about OER librarians and how they approach the field and their daily activities. Answering these questions is an important step toward making OER librarianship sustainable for both the profession and for the librarians filling this role. Accordingly, this study aims to contextualize OER librarians' work by investigating librarians' paths to OER librarianship, their job responsibilities, and their motivations for entering the field.

Methodology

This study, which was approved by the Texas A&M University institutional review board (IRB), employed semi-structured interviews with librarians who were currently working with OER. This language was intentionally broad in order to include dedicated OER librarians as well as OER librarians who also carried other job responsibilities. The author conducted 12 interviews with librarians from across the United States, including librarians from institutions in the Northeast, Midwest, West, and South. Eleven of the

12 interviewees were women; this proportion was somewhat expected, as women are overrepresented in librarianship.[20]

Participants were recruited using two techniques. First, a call for participation was posted to the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC) OER librarian listserv, a publicly available listserv for librarians who work with OER or who are interested in doing so. Five interviewees were recruited via this method. The other seven interviewees were recruited using the snowball method. The author asked participants to recommend other OER librarians to contact as potential subjects and emailed those individuals an invitation to participate. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, and each interview lasted approximately one hour. For participants who consented, interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Transcripts were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach focused on motivations and OER work.[21]

Results

Origins in Field

Interviewees reported a variety of professional entry points into OER librarianship. Only one librarian reported developing an interest in the field while in library school. Instead, most interviewees found their way to the field through a combination of professional interest, guidance from leadership, and relevant expertise.

Several librarians credited their attendance at an OER-related conference as the origin of their interest in the field. One noted, "I went to this Open Con conference… and that really was what got me in, gave me the hook, was going to the meeting with people."

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Another recalled, "I attended a conference, some sort of local ACRL-like something… and I learned more about it, and I just became really interested and engaged."

Other librarians engaged in OER work at the direction of their library leadership. For example, one librarian at a small college noted that her library director told her to "either pick OER or come up with some other professional engagement topic." Another librarian at a mid-sized regional comprehensive university noted that "I had theoretical time free to take on something else. And so I worked with my [supervisors] to brainstorm what that could be. I made a whole bunch of suggestions. And the thing that rose to the top was OER."

Other librarians became involved in working with OER because of their expertise in a related field. Copyright expertise, specifically expertise with Creative Commons licenses, was one area that drew librarians into work with OER. One librarian at a medium-size public liberal arts university explained, "I'm a copyright nerd. And so I think that's how I first got started in OER, because I love copyright and the whole Creative Commons licensing." Another librarian at an R1 ARL library noted, "my [supervisor] was asking if anybody would be willing to lead a session that was going to be about copyright and Creative Commons licensing. And I had had some prior experience with that… So I was like, yeah, sure I'll do it… It just kind of snowballed from that original experience."

Another commonly cited area of relevant expertise was teaching. A librarian at a mid-sized liberal arts college explained, "I honestly could see from the very beginning the connections between open education and information literacy, so that's kind of what pulled me in." Another librarian who moved from a teaching career to a librarian role at a large university noted that it was a colleague who spotted the relevance of her teaching skill set to the library's OER work, observing that "her background with teaching would really benefit with course redesign when it comes to open educational resources." A third librarian from an R1 academic library observed that OER librarianship made sense because it was so similar to what she had done in her previous career as a teacher; "I realized that something that I and my teaching colleagues had been doing forever had gotten a name. And I became interested in how, then, to support that work in other spaces."

Motivation

Librarians expressed a variety of motivations for joining the field of OER librarianship, with many librarians drawing motivation from several areas.

Equity and Social Justice

One common motivation was social justice. As one librarian at an R1 university argued, "If we want

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to treat education as a human right then we have to make sure that students, no matter where they're coming from, are met where they're at." Librarians with a social justice motivation were focused on the struggles that they saw students experiencing on their campuses. For example, a librarian at a small academic library that is part of a larger R1 institution explained:

> I really come at it from a social justice or an equity angle. Especially the cost of college. I have a high school senior myself right now. So, just thinking about students at my campus who are... a lot of them are working full-time jobs. They have families themselves. Or they're working part-time, even. They're trying to get an education to better their life. That if they can't access what they need... food is the most important. Our basic necessities are most important, food and housing. For me, the next level is access to the course materials is central.

This particular motivation was especially prevalent for librarians at schools with large populations of underserved students. For example, a librarian at a small college indicated, "We need this here. This isn't just some rich preppy school where, oh these students want to save money so they can buy beer. This is students saving money so they can have a roof over their heads or afford groceries."

The impact of textbook costs on students had a personal resonance for several interviewees. A librarian from an R1 library drew motivation from her personal experience, recalling, "I was that undergraduate student who couldn't afford textbooks. I bought my textbooks on a book voucher and because I couldn't wait for financial aid to come around if I wanted to start class and be prepared." Another librarian connected the issue

of high textbook costs to her experience as a parent. She explained, "I'm a parent of college students, and I've seen my own kids struggle with it. Even though they could afford to buy the books, the cost bothered them, and they would do everything in their power to find the cheapest option…So seeing all of the different hoops that they would jump through, and they would tell 'em I'll just skip buying the book, I can get by without it."

Several librarians also articulated an experience talking to a student who was personally impacted by textbook costs. Those students' stories resonated with the librarians. For example, a librarian at a large R1 university recalled a student's pragmatic cost/benefit analysis:

> There was a student government leader early on who said they were taking a [certain] class, and it required a textbook and courseware, and they looked at the syllabus and the courseware was worth 10 percent of the grade. And it cost $100, and they did the math and said, "Ok, I'm going to save the $100 and I'm just going to settle for a B at best."

Other librarians sought out stories from students about their textbook costs. One librarian at a small college recalled that "One gal was working at the scanner with a textbook borrowed by someone else and she said, well, actually, I was told that I had to buy an $800 chemistry book… And I kind of choked, because that's basically my entire mortgage payment." Similarly, a librarian at a large public university recounted, "One of our students said they spent like $600 on textbooks, and with that money they would have purchased one of their citizenship applications. And when you hear stories like that, you're like, 'I've got to keep going.'"

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Librarians with a social justice motivation also framed OER work as something within their power that they could do to benefit students. Librarians appeared to feel helpless to make larger changes to higher education inequities, so they identified textbooks and OER as an area where they had the power to make change. For example, one librarian declared, "There's little as a librarian that I can do about tuition and fees and room and board and parking. But I can do something about the textbooks." And another librarian lamented, "There is not much I can do about late-stage capitalism, but this is something I can do."

Working with Faculty

A second commonly cited motivation was working with faculty to impact the learning experience. Many OER librarians found working with faculty particularly rewarding. A librarian at a large university with multiple campuses explained, "One [motivator] is faculty engagement. They are so excited. The faculty that are really into it, are really into it, and they're so excited, and they want to … they love how much they're saving students. They love sharing the story of what their students said, and how their students reacted."

Librarians often cited the value of working with faculty to not only develop resources, but also to impact pedagogy. A librarian at an R1 ARL library explained,

I get a lot of interest from [OER] in what it can do to kind of transform the learning experience for students…. Instead of just being these empty vessels that take in content from a textbook or from the professors or whatever, [students] can be in these situations where they are themselves content creators and are collaborating with their faculty and with their peers in the classroom.

Similarly, a librarian at a mid-sized liberal arts college reflected that she had grown increasingly interested in open pedagogy, which is defined as "the set of pedagogical practices that include engaging students in content creation and making learning accessible."[22] This librarian recalled, "As I continued to work with the faculty in the classroom, and that they continued to be more interested in this concept of open educational practices and open pedagogy, that's really where I've kind of landed." For several of the librarians, the opportunity to collaborate with faculty to make transformational changes to teaching practice was highly rewarding. One librarian at a medium to large institution reflected, "In librarianship you get sometimes sort of bogged down in buying particular resources and helping with scholarship. But you don't always get to see the end product of the student papers and the student work, and the student success, whereas with OERs you do."

Motivation Changes

When asked how their motivations had changed over time, OER librarian responses followed three themes: pragmatism, focus on pedagogy, and faculty-centrism.

Pragmatism

Over time, many OER librarians shifted away from a purist approach and embraced a more pragmatic approach. For some librarians, this meant accepting that other options needed to be considered in addition to OER. For example, one librarian at an R1 institution explained that her motivational change involved "[r]ealizing that OER will not be the answer for everything. For some courses, it's not going to work at all." Other librarians developed a more flexible viewpoint about OER licensing. Another R1 librarian explained, "I went from being an OER purist, it has to be CC BY, to being really a lot more flexible about why people might choose other licenses." This librarian shifted from a preference for the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY), which provides much flexibility for users provided they attribute the source, to recognizing that there may be reasons that, for example, an author may be more comfortable with a license that prohibits commercial use of their work.

Focus on Pedagogy

Another change that librarians commonly recounted was a shift in focus from cost savings to pedagogy. Although librarians emphasized that cost savings were still important to them, they also expressed that they were increasingly focused on the opportunity to make larger pedagogical changes. One commonly cited pedagogical shift was toward open pedagogy; eight of the 12 interviewees mentioned open pedagogy during their interviews. One librarian at a large R1 institution explained, "I've supported more of the open pedagogy… seeing some of the student comments really reinforced that they

really appreciated the active learning, and how, having their voices out in the world, it just felt more engaging, impactful, more up to date…. This is really like getting their diverse voices out in the world."

In addition to open pedagogy, multiple librarians mentioned antiracist pedagogy as a new focus. One R1 librarian explained that she worked with faculty who "really want to decolonize their syllabus and be more inclusive of the authors that they bring into the class to share with students. And that also looks like a lot of curation, but it also looks like a lot of diversity training. So providing them resources with how to think about antiracist pedagogy."

Faculty-Centric

A third motivational change was toward a faculty-centric approach. Several librarians indicated that, while the impact of OER on students was an initial motivator, they were increasingly drawn to the opportunity to collaborate with faculty. As one librarian explained, "Now I would almost say that my primary motivation is, I love working with faculty. And I've made such good friends with faculty…Student savings, yeah, that was the very first thing… Now it's more about seeing faculty get excited about doing something different and being able to help them by teaching them different things."

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The shift to a faculty-centric approach also changed the way that librarians approached their outreach. One librarian at an R1 institution explained that they "noticed that faculty themselves care less about the OER component and more about how it's transforming their course. Having to flip my mindset to be ready to support that growth instead of pushing affordability, affordability, affordability."

OER Work

Interviewees were also asked to describe what their work looks like. When examining the work of an OER librarian, it is important to note that OER work did not constitute an equal share of each librarian's position. For the librarians interviewed, OER responsibilities constituted anywhere between 10 percent and 100 percent of their job responsibilities. Those who were wearing multiple hats typically mentioned that OER was taking more time than allotted in their position descriptions. As one librarian who had multiple roles explained, OER "is where my attention is needed to really serve our population better. We talk in our mission and values statement about service to the community and being the school of choice for underrepresented populations, and I think we need to live that rather than just put it up on banners." Another librarian noted that, as her job increasingly focused on OER, she dropped some of her other responsibilities. She explained. "I no longer do any instruction. I do very little reference… I don't do much collection development at all, so that's why I do more OER work."

Whether OER was a librarian's sole responsibility or whether they had multiple roles, there were several common ways that they spent their OER-focused time. These common responsibilities are detailed in the following sections.

Discovery

Perhaps one of the OER-related tasks most closely identified with librarianship is discovery. Several librarians mentioned that their OER work included assisting faculty in finding potential OER and other low cost-resources. For some librarians, this looked like individual consultations with faculty. Other librarians have worked to scaffold this labor in order to make it less time-consuming. For example, one librarian explained how they use a form for faculty to request information about OER: "We have a process where faculty can request a [textbook cost] review. So they fill out a form, upload their syllabus, and liaison librarians and I will tag team to customize a list of free and affordable resources they might consider." Another librarian described how their library had automated some of the process, explaining "We have a partnership with our bookstore where they provide the list of all required textbooks to us each semester. We go through and see which ones we can provide as unlimited user ebooks." A third librarian had created resources to help minimize librarian time spent on textbook consultations, explaining that "I have tried to do my best to have videos online and searching help for faculty, so they can get through that process on their own."

Internal OER Grants

Many of the librarians interviewed noted that a considerable amount of their workload involves administration and project management for OER grants offered by their libraries or institutions. OER librarians took a leadership role in working with faculty grant recipients. As a librarian at an R1 academic library explained, "I project manage [grants] through the whole time, even if [faculty] are working with a subject liaison, to make sure that they're on track with their goals."

The work of administering grants required different skill sets at different institutions. For example, a librarian at a regional comprehensive university explained that their work with grant recipients required the expertise to answer specific types of questions, noting that "I'm working a lot with the authors that are part of this grant program… so copyright questions and software questions and kind of keeping up with what they're up to." Another librarian from a public urban university described the work involved in preparing the grant program, explaining, "I oversee all the grants. I make sure I do the call for proposals. I chair the committee that selects the proposals. I work with the library administration to help get funding for this." A third librarian from a large university with multiple campuses described the ongoing nature of grant administration work: "We have anywhere from 4 to 10 faculty per semester who are going through the [grant] process, so that's always happening. So day to day, [I'm] making sure that they have their OER, making sure they're hitting their deadlines… making sure the student surveys are sent. So a lot of it is just a lot of project management."

Production and Platforms

In addition to grant management and discovery, many OER librarians' workday included maintenance of OER publishing platforms and support for OER production. Several librarians mentioned responsibility for managing their library's instance of the publishing platform Pressbooks: "We have Pressbooks, which I manage, and our faculty really enjoy being able to kind of customize their own texts, so that's a big part of my job." Managing a library's Pressbooks could also involve working closely with faculty on open pedagogy projects. For example, a librarian at an R1 library explained: "I have a colleague who is teaching a class right now… and she is really interested in open pedagogy. I've been working with her in Pressbooks to get all of her students logged into Pressbooks, set them all up with accounts, and basically doing all of the project management for what is happening with Pressbooks in that course."

Beyond software support, librarians were also actively involved in helping faculty develop their OER. A librarian at a small academic library as part of a larger R1 institution described this work: "I have taken on helping to edit some OER. So working with faculty members, just giving some editorial feedback." Another R1 librarian noted that, on some days "I can dedicate time to production work and just lose myself in the creation of whatever I need to do, particularly if I'm making H5P, which are html5 interactive formative assessment tools." A third librarian noted that she was currently working on an OER publication project, explaining that she spent 16 hours over a 3-day span making the OER accessible:

> We're working on finishing up a book with one of our open textbook authors, and they sent me the manuscript and I'm actually just going to go through and look through the manuscript and verify there isn't any copyright issues popping up, or that overall the citations have been done correctly, just kind of doing that check. … I'm going to go and check to ensure that there's structure, that there's headers, that they follow the [accessibility] guidelines that we provide.

Course Marking

In addition to the efforts listed already mentioned, two librarians noted that they were specifically involved in their college's or university's course marking system. Course marking refers to a system by which courses are tagged with an indicator such as OER, low cost, or zero cost. One librarian described her work in this area as collaborative, noting that they were "trying to work with faculty on creating a streamlined workflow for course marking." Another librarian was actually in charge of course marking efforts for their college, explaining, "We also facilitate course marking. That gets sent to me every Tuesday, so if it's a Tuesday I get all that data, sort through it, send it off to the registrar. So that way those can then be marked."

Service Work

Finally, several librarians noted the importance of service in their jobs. One librarian explained that "Service is a heavy component of my job," noting their involvement in committees and other service activities at the library, university, and professional levels.

Such service was often directly connected to their work on OER; librarians noted involvement in service to support OER advocacy and professional development both inside and outside of their institutions. For example, OER librarians reported serving on planning committees for OER-focused professional development opportunities.

Support, but Lack of Consistent Resources

Another area of discussion was the level of support that OER librarians received for their work. In this context, support includes administrative approval, financial resources, and human resources. Some librarians felt that they received strong support at all of these levels. For example, a librarian at an R1 ARL library felt that "Administratively [OER] is an area that is very much a priority and is supported, not just within the libraries, but institutionally." All of the librarians interviewed felt that they received support at some of these levels. However, most interviewees felt that they needed additional support to maximize their impact.

Lack of Resources

Many librarians lamented a lack of dedicated resources, both human and financial, as barriers to their OER work. Although administrators appeared to embrace the narrative of OER, librarians noted that they were unwilling to dedicate funds to support the work. A librarian from a medium to large public university explained, "Our current provost appears to really like [OER], and appears to want us to seize it as a marketing tool, but is not yet willing to provide funding behind it." A librarian at a small university agreed, noting "If you get people to volunteer their time, if you can find money in other ways, [administrators are] not going to object but they're not going to devote a budget line to it."

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Part of the lack of resources is the limited human capacity of the OER librarians themselves. Some librarians reported that their entire positions were focused on OER work or even that there were multiple positions in their organization that were dedicated to OER. However, others had as little as 10 percent of their time allocated to OER, despite being the only OER librarian at their institution. For example, one librarian at a mid-sized liberal arts college explained, "It's something that my colleagues and dean definitely respect and don't ever push back on, but at the same time they don't really care. I wish I had more support. I wish I had more buy-in, in a sense that like folks were helping with it. Because there's so much more that we could be doing as a department that we're just not because it's just me."

In addition to limited human resources, several librarians lamented the lack of dedicated financial resources to fund their OER programs. Although grant administration was a major aspect of OER work for several interviewees, others were working to build OER programs without funding. One librarian explained, "It has been a challenge not to offer grants like a lot of institutions do for faculty to make the switch to OER. We try to

help this as much as we can but it's basically just me." Another noted that, although they had received money for grants in the past, their funding structure was not consistent. They explained, "Every year I have to go back and ask, hey, can we have money for this again. There is no dedicated budget. I've never had a budget. So it's always kind of just like, man, I hope we get that money again. And it's a lot of me doing legwork to collect statistics and student testimonials to kind of just keep proving this is very valuable and this is how it fits into our strategic plan."

Even at institutions with well-established OER grant programs, funding was reported as a problem. A librarian from an R1 university explained, "Our grant program is really mature and it's at the point where our [specific] grants need to scale up. So we've been doing a lot of strategic planning around thinking about what that looks like and trying to find money for it. That's always the other big thing. Where is the money going to come from to support the grants?" Even libraries with established programs appear to be funding their OER grant programs with donor funds or other temporary funding allocations, rather than with a consistent budget allotment.

Subject Liaisons

Another pain point for OER librarians was their relationship with subject liaisons. Some OER librarians felt that there was friction between the OER and subject librarians due to shared territory; for example, one librarian lamented that "There have been some turf battles over, you know, why are you talking to my faculty? All communications should go through me. So it's been a little tricky navigating that turf." A second problem with liaison librarians was their limited capacity to engage with this work. Several OER librarians described the challenges that liaison librarians face in managing their current workloads; for example, one librarian explained, "Subject librarians are really hard to bring on board. That's for a lot of different reasons. They're overworked. They have very diverse portfolios about what they need to do in their position, from collection management to student support to faculty research support. And a lot of times it can seem like, oh, you're just trying to add one more thing to my plate."

Lack of Familiarity with OER

Several librarians lamented their colleagues' limited understanding of OER. Sometimes this knowledge gap was benign; for example, one librarian noted that "I have the support from my dean, the dean of the library, and my colleagues. I will say there's always been this kind of like, oh, that's [librarian name's] thing. I can't say that many of my colleagues could really even define OER."

Other times, the lack of knowledge actively undermined librarian efforts. One librarian from a large R1 institution explained how a knowledge gap impeded efforts to garner funding to support OER, recounting that "The library once had a development director and we were trying to urge them to get donor funding for OER and they came back and said, you know, I really don't think I can pitch this to donors because they're going to say that if we save students money on textbooks, they're just going to spend it on beer." The development director's lack of knowledge about the financial barriers that students face limited their ability to support funding efforts.

Similarly, librarians reported that a lack of knowledge about OER led administrators to embrace inclusive access as an alternative cost savings measure. A librarian at an R1 ARL library explained that

> Even though, like I said, we certainly have a lot of support at the kind of higher administrative level, I think because those folks are not as... You know, they have all sorts of things that's on their plate, so they're not as deeply ensconced in this work as I am, for instance, so I think that they don't always understand all of the nuances of the work. And so there's been some moves made toward having, like, inclusive access program from Barnes & Noble and I think that some of that stuff kind of muddies the water as far as OER and open education.

Discussion

Paths to OER Librarianship

Over the course of the conversations with interviewees, it became apparent that there was not a single dominant path to OER librarianship. This was an important finding for the field of librarianship because, despite the tremendous growth of OER work in libraries, only recently have library and information science programs begun to add coursework related to OER librarianship.[23] Further, OER work does not naturally progress from a single library subfield. OER work requires expertise in copyright, project management, collection development, pedagogy, coding, and more.

The variety of paths that librarians take to OER work have important implications for practice. Because there was not a single, direct path to OER librarianship, such as a library school concentration, OER librarians may be recruited from a variety of other subfields. Librarians interviewed came from subfields including research, scholarly communications, copyright, and instruction. The librarian's path to the field may influence the way that they approach their position. For example, a librarian with a copyright background may focus their work on providing licensing workshops or consultations with faculty, while a librarian with a teaching background may become interested in open pedagogy. Further, librarians are likely to have both relevant expertise and knowledge gaps based on their path to the field. For instance, a former instruction librarian may have considerable expertise to lend to curricular development but may need additional professional development in copyright.

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The many different professional lenses that librarians bring to OER work have enriched the field. However, it is important to note that OER work often requires a variety of skill sets, some of which librarians may not currently possess. Library and campus administrators must provide OER librarians with adequate professional development and staffing support to enable their successful transition into, and growth within, the role.

Open Pedagogy

In higher education conversations, cost savings are widely touted as the most important benefit of OER. Administrators love to be able to point to eye-popping numbers of student dollars saved due to faculty use of OER instead of commercial textbooks. Interviewees also commonly identified cost savings as one of their initial motivators for becoming involved with OER. As a librarian at a medium-size public liberal arts university observed, "student savings, yeah, that was the very first thing. You know, I think everybody was that way." But over the course of the interviews with OER librarians, it was clear that cost savings was not an enduring motivator for many librarians.

Part of the reason that cost savings may not endure as a motivator for some OER librarians may be because cost savings often were not an effective motivator for faculty. Interviewees indicated that there was no single OER pitch that worked for every audience. For example, one librarian explained that

> You kind of have to pitch different aspects of OER to different people, because I've found the different aspects of it really resonate. For some people it's the customizability or the opportunity to do open pedagogy. For some it's the cost savings. For some it's the day one access. So yeah, just kind of talking about all of the different advantages and seeing what resonates.

Although the faculty did care about the cost of textbooks, cost savings alone was not always an effective motivator for faculty to switch to an OER. Instead, OER librarians were finding that their OER advocacy gained more traction with faculty if librarians focused their pitch on student learning. For example, one librarian observed:

> I'm trying to find faculty persuasions and argue against one of the misconceptions that faculty have to sacrifice altruistically for the betterment of the students, in terms of financial savings. And it's like, no, wait, there's a side for the faculty where you can have more academic freedom and you can have more control over your material and you can increase engagement and the things that faculty care about.

Interviewees largely concurred that pedagogy-focused arguments for OER were more likely to be successful with faculty.

One pedagogy-focused argument that interviewees seemed to have thoroughly embraced was open pedagogy. Instructors employing open pedagogy recognize and include students as creators of open content, and materials produced by students are licensed for open sharing. This can look like student contributions to OER textbooks or course assignments that are shared for a public audience. An open pedagogy class might assign students to create or edit Wikipedia pages, author and respond to blog posts rather than Canvas discussion posts, or otherwise engage openly in scholarship.

Instructors employing open pedagogy recognize and include students as creators of open content, and materials produced by students are licensed for open sharing.

Open pedagogy was mentioned by many interviewees as a direction that they were currently moving in or that they hoped to move toward in the future. For example, one librarian explained that

"my work so swiftly left just open education and moved into open pedagogy because for me it's about so much more than the resources. It's about what we do with the resources." This sentiment was repeated frequently, especially by more experienced OER librarians. Similarly, a librarian explained:

> We used to just focus on this as a faculty project. This is your curriculum. And we now really have expanded it out into while this is your curriculum, how do you get students more engaged in the creation of your curriculum? And what does that look like? And how can your project evolve based on that?

Interestingly, interviewees seemed to identify open pedagogy as a place where OER librarians and faculty can work collaboratively. This differed from cost savings-focused work, which placed OER librarians in service of the faculty, as librarians worked to locate potential OER for faculty and provide incentive programs such as grants.

As librarians advocated for OER on their campuses, they learned that cost savings alone was not an effective argument with all of their target audiences. Nor were cost savings consistently the most exciting or motivating part of the job for OER librarians. Instead, the potential of OER to help transform pedagogy captured the attention of OER librarians, likely because of faculty receptiveness to this argument.

Still, cost savings and affordability remained a critical piece even for the librarians whose motivations have shifted to other areas. One librarian emphasized that although her work has shifted toward open pedagogy, it was still "not losing that affordability piece, because that's what admin wants to hear, that's what the president of the college wants to hear, that's what donors want to hear about is all the cost savings that are happening." Similarly, a librarian from an R1 institution observed that

> Open education provides a lot of those possibilities for students to have the more authentic kind of learning experience. So for me, is kind of, is more of a personal motivator than the cost savings piece of it, although I know that that's the piece that the provost and admin and all of that, that they really like to be able to point to, like look how much money we saved students and all of that. But I, for me, it's the way that it can change learning is what really interests me.

In addition, a librarian at a medium-sized liberal arts college explained that "While still honoring and acknowledging that the cost piece is certainly still a piece of the puzzle and it always will be. But I think it's really important to not move beyond, but expand the definition and the value of it." This suggests that, even as motivations change over time, this change looks more like a broadening than a replacement. The original motivation of cost savings remains, but additional motivations are added, particularly as OER librarians spend more time in the field.

This finding has implications for scoping OER work for long-term success. Interviewees, especially those who have been in the field for more than a year or two, are consistent in identifying cost savings as a key initial motivator. They are also consistent in describing their motivations as becoming more broadly focused on areas related to open pedagogy. As library OER programs become more robust, it will be important to ensure that programs are scoped to include metrics beyond cost savings in order to encourage continued motivation and engagement by OER librarians.

This finding was also significant as it pertains to pathways to OER librarianship. OER librarians came from a variety of educational and library subfield backgrounds, but regardless of background, they often found themselves supporting faculty work in open pedagogy. For this reason, libraries looking to develop OER librarians should consider increased emphasis on experience with pedagogy and learning theory. If open pedagogy continues to develop as a trend in the OER field, librarians with experience and expertise in teaching and learning will be increasingly valuable contributors to the OER movement.

In addition, OER librarians revealed that, although OER was commonly connected to student success efforts on college campuses, this association may be overly narrow.

> **While the impacts of OER on students are indeed important, it was noteworthy that interviewees commonly talked about OER impact on faculty in addition to, or even instead of, students.**

It is true that switching to an OER ensures that all students can access course textbooks, and thus equalizes student access to required learning materials in classes. While the impacts of OER on students are indeed important, it was noteworthy that interviewees commonly talked about OER impact on faculty in addition to, or even instead of, students. Several interviewees identified working one-on-one with faculty as a major source of motivation for them. For example, one librarian explained that "I just fell in love with that one-on-one faculty interaction." As OER librarians saw their motivations shift from cost savings to open pedagogy, they also saw their focus shift from students to faculty.

This finding was significant because library OER programs are so commonly framed around student success, which may be a mistake in marketing. Though OER programs are indeed student success programs, they are also faculty success programs. As libraries recruit or develop OER librarians, the ability to work with faculty through a lens of faculty development is a crucial skill, although one that may not be commonly recognized.

OER Work is Varied and Contextual

Research into the appropriate roles of librarians in OER work indicated that the most appropriate tasks for librarians were discovery, curation, and cataloging.[24] However, the actual work activities reported by librarians were much broader. Many librarians do indeed help with OER discovery, conducting consultations with faculty, or reviewing lists of assigned textbooks to find ways that the library can help reduce those costs. However, discovery appears to be a decreasing share of the work involved in OER librarianship. As one librarian explained, they created tutorials and other resources to help faculty navigate OER discovery on their own in order to free up librarian time for other OER-related tasks.

Instead, many librarians spent considerable time on tasks that faculty were less likely to perceive as appropriate. At institutions that offered OER grants, librarians dedicated time to preparing calls for proposals, selecting recipients, and managing the grant projects. Several OER librarians were intimately involved in OER production, providing

oversight of copyright, accessibility, and tutorial development. Other librarians were involved in policy decisions and implementation on issues such as course marking.

The apparent mismatch between the types of labor research suggests that the work faculty believe OER librarians should do and the actual work that OER librarians perform may reinforce the notion of a gap in understanding about OER. Faculty may underestimate the learning curve that many experience when developing OER, not realizing the types of support that they will need in terms of copyright, technology, and accessibility. Further, they may underestimate the amount of time and labor associated with OER development, or the limited number of funding sources outside of library OER grant programs. It is worth considering whether OER advocacy should include additional transparency about OER work. While dissuading faculty from OER work is not desirable, neither is making the considerable labor and expertise of OER librarians invisible.

Need for Consistent Resources

OER librarians consistently noted that their work with OER was supported by their colleagues, supervisors, and even university administrators. However, for some librarians, that support was shallow in nature. Even though library and university administrators may be willing to tout the positive narrative of OER on their campuses, they are not always willing or able to devote the necessary resources to build and sustain this work. The disparities between the workloads of OER librarians are stark. While some universities have multiple OER librarians and funding, other OER librarians perform this work in an "other duties as assigned" capacity, squeezing in OER work around reference desk duty, collection development, and instruction sessions.

Several librarians indicated that they bore the sole responsibility for OER work in their library and that they were unable to rely on assistance from (or even faced friction from) their colleagues. By isolating the work of OER into a single position description, libraries and universities also limited the number of individuals who have a solid understanding of OER-related issues such as textbook costs, student financial need, and inclusive access. This is significant because librarians do not always have a seat at the table when it comes to development or negotiating inclusive access contracts. Rather than identifying OER as one person's job, administrators at the library and university levels must learn about OER and associated issues in order to be prepared to discuss them with donors and textbook vendors.

Another area where additional support was needed is funding. Although grant administration was an important part of the job for many librarians, the lack of funding for grant programs was a consistent issue raised by interviewees. Some OER programs, even those that were well-established, had never had a budget for grants. Others had temporary funding and were constantly having to advocate for continued funding from administrators or donors. The lack of consistent funding, or funding at all, limited librarians' ability to incentivize and support faculty OER work.

Interviewees explained that funding for grants was important not only as an incentive, but also for ethical reasons. Even though the dollar amounts for grants were typically small, OER librarians felt that this funding was a crucial way to compensate faculty directly for their work. One librarian even stated that faculty funding was a prerequisite

for her to work with faculty on OER projects. She explained, "I work with faculty that are interested in OERs and wanting to publish them. But I don't feel comfortable doing any type of project with them if I can't provide funding to support their labor."

Limitations and Future Directions

There are multiple limitations to this study. First, study participants were recruited via an open call on a listserv for OER librarians. It is possible that librarians participating on such a listserv may consider OER work a more central part of their role than those who do not. Further, many of the librarians interviewed were from R1 institutions. Librarians at other types of institutions may have different experiences in their work with OER. Future research should explore the experiences of librarians at other types of institutions.

Conclusion

As the OER movement has grown in higher education, librarians have been central to campus initiatives. To support OER librarians, library and campus administrators must gain a better sense of their work. Understanding the labor that OER librarians perform, as well as the motivations that keep librarians engaged and enthusiastic about the work, is an important component of a successful campus OER program. By identifying the motivations and challenges of OER librarians, administrators can support librarians in shaping effective and appropriately resourced programs that can be sustained in the long term.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

- Please tell me about your job. What do you do?
- What does a typical day look like for you?
- What does an atypical day look like for you?
- Please describe for me how you came to get involved with OER.
- How would you describe your primary motivations for working with OER?
- How have your motivations for working with OER changed since you got started?
- Please describe for me how your library feels about OER.
- Please describe for me how your university feels about OER.

- What does your work on OER look like today?

- How has your work with OER changed since you started?

- How would you describe the future of your work with OER? What's next?

Demographics:

- What type of library do you work at?

- How long have you worked at that library?

- What percentage of your job is spent working on OER?

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