Open Educational Resources (OER) – Pilot and Proof of Concept

Project Completion Report

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Background

In July 2019 Deakin University Library commenced a six month project to investigate Open Educational Resources (OERs), Digital Rights Management (DRM) free information resources for use in Deakin's teaching and learning. The project focused on how the use of OERs and similar resources can support learning and teaching, provide an improved return on University investments, and in some cases obviate the need for students to purchase textbooks and other prescribed readings.

Project Outputs

- **OER and DRM-free Defined**

  o Deakin University Library's OER and DRM-free resource definitions for the project:

    – Open Education Resources (OERs) are educational materials available for free use and adaption under an open sharing license (e.g. Creative Commons) or are free from copyright restrictions (i.e. the public domain) that can enrich the Deakin teaching and learning experience.

    – DRM-free (Digital Rights Management-free) are online resources with copyright restrictions. They have or can be purchased by Deakin and are available for anyone to use within Deakin.

- **OER Wiki Page**

The OER Project Wiki Page was created as a working space for the project and includes definitions, license information, benefits and disadvantages, latest surveys, news, reports and guidelines on OER selection.

  o OER resources were collected in the following categories in the wiki page:
    – Institutional repositories
    – Grant-funded websites
    – Australian OERs
    – OERs by subject category
    – OERs by format
    – OERs from around the world

Before including any OER, an initial assessment was made to ascertain if it was appropriate for Deakin. An evaluation checklist was developed to support the project and as a tool for future use. It is based on the following criteria:

  o Licence
  o Suitability
  o Quality
  o Ease of use

- **Networking**

A range of opportunities presented during the project, these included:

  o The Australasian Open Education Practice Special Interest Group, sponsored by ASCILITE. Each month the group meets virtually to bring Universities up to date on news, events, opportunities, and research.
  o Industry consultation with Frank Ponte, Manager, Library Services (Teaching) from RMIT and Adrian Stagg, Manager (Open Educational Practice) from University of Southern Queensland who are both avid promoters and users of OER.
  o The Open Education Seminar, 8th October 2019, with guest speaker James Glapa-Grossklag (the past president of the Open Education Consortium).

As a result, Deakin University Library now has representation on relevant industry groups and events. It also has improved our understanding of OER developments within Australia and we are now better placed to monitor and engage in this space.

- **OER / DRM-free Resource Guide**

The OER Resource Guide was developed to educate and guide Academics and Liaison Librarian's in this space. The guide was a collaboration between the OER Librarian, Liaison Librarians and Digital Libraries and Repositories staff to provide an ongoing source of information and assistance to University staff on OERs and DRM-free resources after the completion of this project. The development of this tool was informed by an initial survey of Liaison Librarians, which highlighted the areas where further education was required. We expect the tool to go live in early 2020 with a

communication plan currently in development to support its launch.

- **Attribution Tool**

An Open Attribution Builder Form was developed based from Open Washington's widget. In collaboration, the Open Education Resources Librarian, Digital Libraries and Repositories and the Licensing Teams developed an online OER form customised for use at Deakin University. This form helps users to comply with the attribution requirement of a CC licence. For example, it allows you to enter the title, URL for work, author and website, organization, and CC license type. It will then provide attribution information which can be copied and pasted into their work containing the CC license. This Form supports and encourages users to adopt, adapt, understand derivatives and easily comply with the rules of OER.

Project Findings

The development of OERs is more prevalent overseas, even though there is increasing interest in Australia for OERs generally and for Australian OERs. There are currently 61 subscribed members of the Australasian Open Educational Practice Special Interest Group (OEPSIG) with 20 Australian institutions represented. This group meets once a month to resolve issues, keep up to date with current news, webinars and actively promote OER adoption and encourage universities to create their own. The University of Sydney recently created the first customizable OER on the subject of 'Australian Politics and Policy'. Over 60 authors across Australia have contributed open access content. The level of content is suitable for a diverse range of undergraduate and postgraduate contexts. Educators can customise their own bespoke version of the textbook or include chapters in course readers.

In 2019, Deakin had eight prescribed /recommended OERs (two units from Law, five units from SEBE and one from Health) and over 40 DRM-free resources also being used as prescribed/recommended texts. This selection of OERs and DRM-free resources potentially saved our students an estimated $264,185 in 2019. This cost is estimated based on 50% of students purchasing prescribed and recommended texts at commercial cost of a print copy. This aligns with practice recommended by the Open Textbook Initiatives Student Savings Calculator (Open Textbook Initiative, 2018).

There is indicative data that shows that some Deakin students may not buy their textbook so providing alternate access is essential. In July 2019, a DUSA Facebook poll found 73% of respondents said they would not purchase the required textbook for their unit (Deakin University Student Association, 2019).

Licensing of OER and DRM-Free resources are reasonably flexible and offer value to the University, however, they do have conditions of use that need to be understood and met.

With the growing interest in OERs within Australia and affordable course content initiatives, university-level participation in OER projects and consortia offers an excellent opportunity to leverage ongoing investments among peer institutions locally and to create opportunities for educational impact for Deakin University at the national level.

OER participation may contribute positively to long-term objectives in relation to accessible education, innovative and open teaching and aligns with Deakin's values of equity and social inclusion.

Barriers to Adoption

Lack of awareness: One of the primary barriers to adopting OERs and DRM-free resources is lack of awareness. Hoosen and Butcher (2019) state 'The acceptance and understanding of OER in the Australian Higher Education and Secondary education sectors has occurred slowly as part of wider debates around the increased adoption of digital technologies, Open Access, and online learning in the sector. Earlier acceptance of the concept by teachers and policy makers may have been limited by lack of understanding about copyright and open licensing as well as concerns about the potential value of OER in online pedagogy; the quality and sustainability of OER; its interaction with commercial business models for online educational services and the lack of a perceived compelling need for these type of resources'.

Complexities in finding a suitable OER: Searching for suitable OERs to meet teaching and learning needs can be time-consuming since there is no single source of OERs. The licensing process when selecting an OER can also take time depending on the type of license restriction and academics' familiarity in how to apply the license.

Concerns about OER content: In particular, whether such resources are of a suitable standard and if relevant for the Australian context. Since many OER repositories allow any user to create an account and post material, some resources may not be relevant or accurate. OER creators generally do not receive any type of payment, and there may be little incentive for them to update their OER or to ensure that it will continue to be available online.

This project has enabled Deakin University Library to address some aspects of these barriers through:

- the development of the OER / DRM-free Resource Guide to support awareness raising and understanding of how these resources can be accessed and utilised
- the development of the 'ebooks - DRM free' filter within the 'A-Z databases' on the Library website to make it easier to search for Deakin owned DRM free resources
- the collaborative activities undertaken with Library liaison teams has increased our capacity to provide

advisory services to faculty staff in relation to finding and using OER and DRM free alternatives.

Survey and Results

At the commencement of the project, a survey was undertaken to better understand liaison librarians' knowledge of OERs and DRM-Free resources and also of the current use of these types of resources at Deakin. The survey results showed, on average, 60% of Deakin's liaisons librarians have a clear understanding of what OERs and DRM free resources are. It also revealed that difficulties in finding OER or DRM free resources were ranked as the highest barrier to adoption of such resources. Liaison librarians were unclear where to find OERs and DRM-Free materials. This discovery issue is connected to other barriers to OER adoption, such as a lack of content for a particular subject and quality was consistently ranked the second highest barrier to OER adoption. The feedback indicated that additional support and professional development for liaison librarians and interested academics would be useful. It also revealed that there is little to no discussion between liaison librarians and academics about OERS / DRM free resources when the latter are selecting resources for their teaching and learning.

The project concluded with a follow up survey in which a reduced number of respondents participated (approximately half the original number). Knowledge and understanding of OERs and DRM-free resources, where to find them and how to attribute them (including understanding of Creative Commons Licenses) remains mixed. Half of this group (oscillating between 45 and 60% depending on the question) appear confident in their knowledge. It is possible that the data of both surveys indicates that the more one learns about OERs, the more their complexity is realised. Verbatim comments indicate that ongoing support and training in this area would be useful and includes praise for the prepared Resource Guide.

Feedback about whether there is interest amongst academics to use an OER or DRM-free resource in their units is also mixed. There appear to be a small number of specific opportunities to follow up in terms of both definite and possible interest. Further exploration could be undertaken more broadly as other responses indicate this is not known. More than two thirds of respondents said they would recommend OER/DRM-free resources, the remainder indicated maybe. Verbatim comments identify the importance of context, availability and usefulness as key factors in the use of such resources.

Recommendations

The potential value of OER and DRM-free resources to save students money and ensure they have access to course relevant content remains mostly untapped at Deakin University. The following recommendations are made:

While understanding and use of OERs is relatively new to Deakin University, active participation in the Open Education Resource movement may be beneficial. The more academics are made aware of OERs and DRM free resources, the more likely they will be adopted when appropriate to support teaching and learning. Future evaluation of such adoptions may clarify what contribution they can make to reducing costs for students and to the uptake of new teaching and learning technologies and skills amongst academics.

Next steps will involve working with the Liaison Librarians and other University staff to promote the value and use of OERs and DRM-Free resources for consideration by academics as part of the Library's overall message that electronic resources support better access for students. A communications campaign aimed at academics is currently in development.

Library Executive

Currently, not all students have access to their prescribed or recommended readings, due to:

- Resources being commercially available in print format only
- Electronic resources being commercially available with only individual or institutional licenses, both being unsuitable for library lending. Institutional licenses are typically costed based on unit enrolments per intake which make them financially unsustainable in the mid to long term.

It is recommended that Library Executive:

- advocate with University Senior Management the value and importance of guidelines for prescribed and recommended readings to ensure inclusion of resources that are available electronically and can support maximum level of access, with minimal or no license restrictions on their use.

Client Services Staff

The project has supported the Liaison Librarians' readiness to start the conversation with Deakin academics, now equipped with relevant information, tools and resources.

It is recommended that they:

- continue to keep up to date with the latest OER news through OER forums, readers digests, newsletters, OER networks and social media
- investigate and recommend to academics the full range of electronic resource options available to ensure maximum access for students, including OER and DRM-free resources
- provide an advisory service to academics looking for a suitable OER
- Maintain and update the OER Resource Guide by surveilling OER repositories - this will be important to track developments and changes.

Collections, Copyright and Licensing Staff

It is recommended that they:

- continue to ensure OER/DRM free resources are discoverable and related information is updated within relevant Library systems

Promotion and Marketing

It is recommended that:

- communications promoting OER and DRM free resources aligns with the Library's key message encouraging academics to adopt electronic resources that maximise access to prescribed and recommended readings for students - OER and DRM free resources are part of a range of resources that may be suitable depending on the teaching and learning context.

Reference List

Deakin University Student Association 2019, 'Question Time! If textbooks are required for your unit, do you purchase them?', *Facebook*, 19 July, viewed 13 January 2020, < https://www.facebook.com/YourDUSA/posts/2372743466119403>.

Open Textbook Initiative. 2018. Student Savings Calculator. [ONLINE] Available at: https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/oer/calculator. [Accessed 13 January 2020].

Hoosen, S & Butcher, N 2019, *Understanding the Impact of OER: Achievements and Challenges*, retrieved 13 January 2020, < https://iite.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Understanding_the_impact_of_OER_2019_final.pdf>.

Interesting reads:

Bossu, C., Brown, M., and Bull, D. (2011). Playing catch-up: Investigating public and institutional policies for OER practices in Australia. Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning, 15(2), 41–45.

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