

## **Growth of the Open Educational Resource Movement**

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### **Abstract**

The cost of a textbook for an undergraduate course can average between \$60.00 and \$300.00. In particular, the cost of textbooks for Hispanic and other minority students can sometimes exceed the cost of their tuition. The increasing cost of commercial texts has led many students to find alternatives for the purchase of their required course text. Students may purchase an older or international version of the text, rent them, or buy e-books. Many students do not purchase the text for the course because they cannot afford the book in any format. The implementation of Open Educational Resources as a means of reducing the cost of student textbooks has grown dramatically in recent years. This paper outlines the development of the OER trend in community colleges in particular and discusses the practical applications for the development of a business law course at Queensborough Community College.

In 2002, UNESCO convened a conference to discuss the impact of digital resources. During this meeting, a recommendation was made by Saul Fisher, of the Andrew Mellon Foundation, to utilize the term, “open educational resources,” for the availability of course development materials. This led to an era of digital and technology based learning that would

revolutionize the horizon of course resources and development. One of the outcomes of the conference was the definition of the term, open educational resources, the following definition was adopted: “The open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes” <sup>1</sup>(UNESCO, 2002, p. 24).

As a follow-up to the UNESCO conference, in 2007, the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) launched the Creative Commons. The Creative Commons is an online platform designed to provide a forum for the availability of educational resources for use by educational professionals. The Creative Commons created an online environment to allow professionals to network and explore the various teaching modalities available through the platform. Since its creation in 2007, according to the site, they have forged partnerships with over 500 content providers. “As such, ISKME helps schools, colleges, universities, and the organizations that support them expand their capacity to collect and share information and create open knowledge-driven environments focused on learning and success.”<sup>2</sup>

The site allows users to search a database of over 40,000 files for texts, videos, lesson plans and other available resources. An individual who utilizes the Creative Commons database can apply for a Creative Commons license which is free. There are a variety of license types available depending on the use of the OER publication by the author. The availability of the material for use is divided in subject areas.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. (2002). *Forum on the impact of open courseware for higher education in Developing countries: Final report*. Retrieved from [www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/focus/opensrc/PDF/OERForumFinalReport.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/focus/opensrc/PDF/OERForumFinalReport.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> About Us. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2015, from <http://www.iskme.org/about-us>

## Statistical Data Supporting the Implementation of OER Course Texts

During the 2010-2011 academic year, the Kaleidoscope Open Course Initiative (KOCI), conducted a study of eight community and state colleges. Each school agreed to work together to develop new courses and texts based solely on OER. The study compared students enrolled in courses that used only OER resources, approximately 4,000, and courses with commercial textbooks with an estimated enrollment of almost 11,000 students. “Across the five classes, textbooks cost on average \$65.93 per course. There were 1,727 students enrolled in KOCI classes at Cerritos. Those students potentially saved a total of \$104,253.57 over the two semesters. There were 4,683 students enrolled in classes similar to those using KOCI texts; however, these classes used traditional textbooks. Those students potentially spent a total of \$320,484.59 on textbooks during this same time period.”<sup>3</sup> This study demonstrates the drastic financial disparities faced by students who are not afforded the opportunity to utilize OER resources. The study looked at textbooks across a variety of disciplines. Although there were disparities in the cost of the text depending on the discipline, the outcomes of the study were clear. Students who participate in courses that utilize OER resources have the potential to save almost a \$1,000 per year. These figures are a clear indication of the need for a wider implementation of these resources at community colleges.

## Discipline Specific OER Course Implementation

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<sup>3</sup> John Levi, H., T. Jared, R., David, W., & Dale, A. (2014). Cost-savings achieved in two semesters. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 15(2), 68-84.

In the Spring of 2015, the library at Queensborough Community College (“QCC”) offered faculty the opportunity to apply for an OER grant. The purpose of the grant was to encourage faculty to develop course specific texts for eventual implementation. The authors of this article received a grant to complete an OER resource for a business law course that all three teach. The desire of the authors to pursue an OER based text for their courses was based on assessment results for the business law course. Assessment results indicated an increasing number of students who did not purchase the text.

An average business law text costs approximately \$200 per text. A business law course taught at the community college level typically only covers twelve to fourteen chapters per semester. A majority of the commercial business law texts on the market are meant for a two semester course. The development of an OER text provided a more affordable alternative for our students while delivering a superior educational resource than had been available.

The other impetus for the development of an OER resource was the dynamic and changing landscape of business law. Current trends and online resources provide a more timely and interactive method for teaching business law. For example, a student can learn about the U.S. Court system through a free online interactive web site. In many instances, the articles, documentaries and court cases are more timely in an OER text. The OER resources also provide the opportunity to move beyond the traditional text and explore valuable resources.

Our text utilizes the most current, informative and thought provoking legal resources available and it delivers those resources in a form that enhances retention. The text is divided into three (3) modules and each module provides our students with the necessary reading, video resources, links to pertinent case material and podcast materials to develop their critical thinking and legal reasoning skills. The students would be required to buy the print version of the OER

and to use, in conjunction with it, the Blackboard course site which contains the videos, podcasts, powerpoint material and internet links.

The OER Business Law course description is: a brief survey of the American legal system; development and application of essential principles of law as it relates to business contracts, torts, criminal law and intellectual property; a study of recent cases related to each of the topics covered; and the relationship between legality, ethics, and the social responsibility of individuals and businesses within the context of society.

The first module is entitled; “The U.S. Legal System & Historical Trends” which covers the origins and development of the American legal system and provides a concise analysis of the historical events that shaped our society and our laws. The second module is entitled, “Practical Applications of Business Law,” a detailed analysis of business ethics and corporate responsibility, the law of criminal law, torts, and intellectual property. The third module is entitled and focuses on “Contracts and Small Business Development.”

As an example, we include herewith a description of Module 1 as an example of the format:

**Module I – The Magic & Mystery of the Law**

1. An Introduction to the Law & The Courts
2. The Process of Litigation and Alternative Dispute Resolution
3. The Landmark Significance of Constitutional Law: “A Living Document for the Ages”

**Learning Objectives:**

- (1) to help students understand the sources of law, nature of legal
- (2) precedence ("stare decisis") and the classifications of the law;

- (3) to promote students' ability to think critically about the litigation process at all levels and alternatives to litigation;
- (4) to advance students' understanding of federalism, our system of sharing of power between state and federal government, the supremacy clause, and individual rights and restrictions.

### **Student Performance Outcomes**

An area of concern regarding the use of OER resources is student performance. In 2013, a study was done at a community college in Houston, Texas. The study looked at the use of OER resources in a math course. The researchers determined that there was not a difference in the outcomes of students in the math courses. The authors noted that additional research was needed to determine if differences in student performance could be ascertained in courses where OER resources are used.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that high schools are moving toward mobile tablets to provide textbooks for their courses. A platform called Net Texts, allows teachers to create a customized digital course. The other advantage to the Net Texts system is that it provides a student access to their course materials from any location. The student does not need internet access as long as they have downloaded the necessary texts.

The variety of student success studies done varies across educational institutions. Tidewater Community College in Virginia launched the Z-Degree program to provide students the chance to save money on tuition while using only OER resources “It’s made a huge difference in terms of retention and success with our students,” Williams said “What we have

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<sup>4</sup> Hilton, J., Gaudet, D., Clark, P., Robinson, T. J., & Wiley, D. (2013). The adoption of open educational resources by one community college math department. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 14(4). Retrieved from <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1523>.

found from the data of a two year pilot study is that we have a reduction in the number of students who drop the course, we find that they withdraw at a lower percentage than the non-Z counterparts, and they have succeeded at a rate equal to or slightly better than the non-Z counterpart classes.”<sup>5</sup> It is obvious from the initial data that institutions need to make a concerted effort to promote the development of OER resources to support their students educational development.

### **Course Design & Assessment**

Our OER text has been developed with the intent of making Business Law come alive for our students. First, we developed an initial table of contents based upon the most current legal topics. The text is a combination of written and video materials in the form of internet links. In particular, the use of video resources provides the students the ability to learn using multimedia sources. The course is being assessed and compared to courses where the OER resources have not been implemented to see if there are any differences in retention and grades. This assessment will be done using the Quality Matters rubric.

### **Conclusion**

We believe that it is essential to the success of our students to provide an alternative to the traditional commercial text. The traditional text has proven both ineffective and costly for our students. Many of our students work full-time and attend school. The overwhelming cost of textbooks has become an undue burden for students. We believe that the changing field of technology and OER provides a framework for faculty to develop ways in which to help students succeed.

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<sup>5</sup> Wood, C. (2015, March 16). Community college proves that schools don't need textbooks. *Center for Digital Education* , Retrieved from <http://www.centerdigitaled.com/higher-ed/Community-College-Proves-that-Schools-Dont-Need-Textbooks.html>