



What I Wish You Knew About OER: Contrasting Librarian and Faculty Perspectives from an OER Couple

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ABSTRACT

When you talk to others on your campus about OER, do you ever feel like you're speaking different languages? So do we, and we're a married couple working at the same campus! A scholarly communication librarian in charge of campus-wide OER advocacy, and a faculty member who's adopted, authored, and researched OER, we each bring our own skills, experiences, and motivations to the table. What might you be overlooking about the other perspective, and how might these blind spots be hindering your efforts to advance OER? This dialogic essay offers practical examples born from our lived experiences, delivered in a conversational and occasionally humorous tone. We explore the challenges and opportunities inherent in this dynamic relationship, focusing on how librarians can hone their approach to better address faculty needs and motivations, while faculty can learn to recognize and more fully utilize the expertise of their library colleagues.

Note: This was first delivered as a presentation at the Open Education Conference, Oct.2025.

KEYWORDS

Open educational resources, OER, advocacy, librarian, and faculty perspectives

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Scene 1: Introduction ^{1 2}

[Faculty at a lectern. Librarian at the back of the room.]

Faculty: Good afternoon, and welcome to “What I Wish You Knew about OER: Contrasting Librarian and Faculty Perspectives from an OER Couple.” I’m a Professor of Music, and I’m presenting today with our campus’ scholarly communication librarian, who also happens to be my wife, who is, um –

[Librarian interrupts, putting away her cell phone as she makes her way to the lectern.]

Librarian: Here, I'm here!

Faculty: Perfect, what happened?

Librarian: ...Well that was interesting, somehow this faculty got my cell number and wants me to know how mad they are. I said no to funding their OER grant. They are using an illegal upload of a copyrighted textbook they found on Google!

Faculty: Oh, well that's actually great timing, because that's the topic of our... *session!*

Librarian: Ah yes, our...very public... *couple's session.*

Scene 2: Framework

Librarian: Okay, where do we start?

Faculty: Let’s check our notes from the last session...

[Both take out their “therapy notebooks.”]

Librarian: Oh right. We’re still working on our active listening. *Okay, you have my attention.*

Faculty: *And you have mine.*

Librarian: And for our “homework,” Dr. Jenn gave us a few topics to talk through. The first one is Communication.

¹ This fictional conversation is inspired by real issues often faced by librarians and faculty involved in OER advocacy. It is not meant to be a true representation of any particular interaction, individual, department, or institution.

² This script was first delivered as a presentation at the Open Education Conference, October 28, 2025, in Denver, CO.

Scene 3: Communication

Librarian: So, did you come up with some things you'd like OER practitioners or librarians, like me, to know about the best ways to communicate with faculty regarding OER initiatives?

Faculty: I thought up a few. They're pretty basic, but important. First, librarians should be aware of the academic calendar when they're emailing faculty about OER initiatives. Don't send important updates or set deadlines during the first week of the semester or the week prior, or during finals week. I promise I will not read them.

Librarian: That seems a little... picky?

Faculty: I'm *sharing* right now...

Librarian: ...Okay, *you have my attention*.

Faculty: Thank you. Another thing is, faculty need a lot of lead time for any initiative that requires significant upfront work on their end, like calls for adoption or creation grants. 4 to 6 weeks minimum, but a few months is even better.

And related, you'll reach more people if you market your programs in multiple ways. Don't just send an email or two and assume your message reaches everyone. Ask your provost and deans to help spread the word, hold workshops through your center for teaching, and arrange visits to individual departments to talk about these opportunities.

Librarian: Yes, okay...I already do most of those things. But thank you for sharing.

Faculty: All right, your turn. What would you like faculty to know about communicating with librarians concerning OER?

Librarian: I guess most importantly that you are not alone. Sometimes faculty are... set in their ways, and any suggestions of change are met with pushback or just ignoring us. We will help you find materials. We are trained professionals with advanced degrees and years of experience finding and evaluating relevant resources.

We also have an entire team of instructional designers who will help integrate OER into your course LMS. They are also trained and have experience in helping faculty be more successful in teaching with the tools they provide. So, respect these people's expertise and make use of it!

Faculty: Yes! Wow, we are so good at communication. What's next on the list?

Librarian: Hey, wait, I'm not done! I wanted to talk about the panel.

Faculty: What panel?

Librarian: *The panel we did on [look at notes] March 3rd, 2020, at... 2pm. Remember, that time you completely contradicted the point of our talk by saying no one should adopt OER before they get tenure???*

Faculty: Um, I remember Dr. Jenn asking us to use “*I feel*” statements instead of “you” statements...

Librarian: Okay... Remember when we were giving our first ever on-campus panel presentation about OER, and several faculty and I spoke about the value of OER, and you said during your portion that no faculty should think about adopting OER while they are still working toward tenure? That made me *feel*... undermined because it was such a shift in our message. In the future, I would *appreciate* it if you’d check in with me before a curveball like that, especially at a campus-wide event meant to encourage faculty to get on board with OER!

Faculty: I hear what you’re saying. I understand how that would make you feel undermined. In the future, I will get my thoughts written down earlier so we can go over them, get on the same page, and ensure we are pulling in the same direction.

I’d like to point out that, when I made my shift to OER, I spent two years authoring workbook materials for my four classes, during which I had to largely put my research on hold. That choice could have seriously hindered my chances of getting tenure. And that made me *feel*... anxious about the future. So, I was speaking from my experience, hoping to help others approach their work with clear eyes.

Librarian: Thank you for being honest about your constraints. I acknowledge that faculty, especially those in their tenure-earning years, have to be protective of their time.

Faculty: In retrospect, I should have spoken more carefully and said that people shouldn’t jump right to *creating* OER before exploring if they can instead adopt or adapt some. And that, if they do choose to create OER, they should do it sustainably, setting reasonable goals, seeking support from colleagues on their campus or peers at other schools, seeking internal and external grant funding, and by learning how their campus T&P policies recognize and reward this work.

Librarian: That way of putting it would have fit a lot better with the rest of the panel... And maybe we could work together to revisit our campus’ tenure and promotion policies to ensure they include acknowledging the creation of OER in particular, as legitimate contributions to both teaching and research.

Faculty: I would love to. Glad we cleared that up!

[Both give a thumbs up and a wink to the audience.]

Scene 4: Meet in the Middle

Faculty: [Flips through notes] Next, Dr. Jenn said: “What does meet in the middle mean to you?” Were you able to come up with your two examples?

Librarian: Yes. I'll start with *compromise*. I know now that I need to be more flexible in not only how I approach faculty about OER adoption, but in finding materials. When faculty do reach out for help, I shouldn't force any particular OER on them just because it is OER.

Faculty: Sure, that makes sense. Do you have an example?

Librarian: Sure. I have this faculty who's been looking for OER on the topic of “Nursing & Global Health in Guatemala” for her upcoming study abroad course. I looked as far as my Googling can take me, and I found some OER that might work for global health, but none specifically about Guatemala. Rather than asking her to write her own OER, we came to a compromise and found free library-provided e-textbooks and supplemented with journal articles. So, she'll use those subscription-based items in addition to the OER, and I'm okay with that.

Faculty: Great job. I love that you were able to find a compromise and help that faculty!

Librarian: Faculty, how do you “meet in the middle?”

Faculty: I thought about making sure we are checking our blind spots. When I first started authoring OER, I didn't fully understand Creative Commons licensing, even though I had been using them for a few years. I also remember hearing you correct some other faculty when they referred to their own adopted resources as “open-source textbooks.” I didn't realize there was a difference until then! So, I had some blind spots on the terminology and expertise.

Librarian: Yeah, I remember that. I appreciate you telling me about those blind spots of yours.

Faculty: And you've shared in the past that you have some blind spots related to course creation and textbook adoptions.

Librarian: Definitely. I think learning more about how and when course sections get created, and assigned to faculty, and when and how course materials get assigned in various departments – can help me meet the departments where they are and improve our OER initiatives.

Faculty: What else have you got?

Librarian: I think librarians can use *creative thinking* to help meet in the middle. This is about how we advocate and reach out about OER, but also, like you said, to whom and when. I

know you all aren't always reading my emails! So, I've talked to faculty at new faculty orientation, gotten students involved in advocacy, and reached out to chairs and deans to see which of them have some pull about what textbooks get used.

Following OER practices, I try to *remix* and *adapt* my advocacy strategy. I've even been known to contact some of our faculty via LinkedIn! If they post about a new class they're teaching or a new program, I'll comment that they should reach out to me for an OER that might work.

Faculty: I love that!

Librarian: I know, thank you.

Faculty: My last “meet in the middle” technique is to lean into *empathy*. It's important for librarians to accept that OER is not going to work for every class. For general education courses where a faculty is teaching 500 students across multiple sections, that proprietary test bank may be the difference between managing that workload and everything falling apart – at least in the short term. And a lot of times faculty don't know which courses they'll be assigned months in advance. Sometimes, it's the week before classes start!

Librarian: Of course. At the same time, faculty need to recognize that librarians have their own limitations, like uncertainty of funding, changing campus policies and priorities, and trying to serve the entire campus on limited time.

Faculty: I can see why that would be challenging!

Librarian: And I didn't realize that the course rotation calendar would have such a big impact until we started offering our textbook affordability grants. We ask faculty who are awarded funds to teach using their free or OER course materials for at least 3 semesters – which was mandated by our administration, which funds the grant, not by me – and a bunch of faculty told me they wanted to apply but have no idea what they will be teaching semester to semester. So, I decided to notify the chairs that faculty are doing this work, and are getting a grant for it, so that chairs will be aware of it when assigning courses.

Faculty: I think that's a great example of leading with empathy and letting your understanding of the other party's issues inform your work.

Librarian: Thanks, my love.

Faculty: Anytime!

[Both give another thumbs up and a wink to the audience.]

Scene 5: Don't Go to Bed Angry

Faculty: Alright, I *feel*... like we're making some good progress here.

Librarian: I see what you did there. Nice.

Faculty: Well, what else does Dr. Jenn want us to dig into?

Librarian: [Flips through notes] "Don't go to bed angry."

Faculty: Ummm, okay... What does that have to do with building healthy relationships between librarians and faculty around OER?

Librarian: Well... for example... I *feel* like when I send an email to all faculty about OER grants, adoption opportunities, or even just to brag about our successes, I'm sometimes met with disdain. Faculty act like I'm telling them *how* to teach and expecting them to stop what they're doing and write a book! I feel it would be good for them to acknowledge my perspective...

Faculty: Wow. I *feel* like you're painting with a pretty broad brush there—

Librarian: Well, I *feel* that faculty don't appreciate it when I email them about a specific OER that is available that may fit perfectly with their course - sometimes that "random email" is not *really* coming from me. Administration has tasked me with increasing OER adoption, specifically by targeting high enrollment gen ed courses. Then I get emails back about how dare I tell faculty what to teach with! Fast forward a semester, and the administration asks me to email those same faculty yet again. It is hard not to get frustrated! Faculty don't realize I am trying to navigate various power dynamics as well.

Faculty: That sounds super frustrating. How can faculty....?

Librarian: [interrupting] Oh! And let's not forget the times when faculty *do* want help finding OER, and they send me an email that just says: "Help, I need OER for Nutrition." This needs to be a collaboration. I am not a subject expert in every academic program. They need to send me their syllabus, course outcomes, what textbooks or other resources they usually use, and *then* I can start looking for them!

And after I send some options, *please* reply and tell me if they work or not! Faculty shouldn't ask me to do hours of work and then ghost me because the text is missing one chapter, they think is important, or because they couldn't be bothered to even review it! I am a librarian, *not a vending machine!!*

Faculty: Wow. That was... a lot.

Librarian: Yeah. I know.

Faculty: Are you ready to hear my reaction to your reaction?

Librarian: ...Okay.

Faculty: [cautiously] Okay. I hear what you are saying, and I validate those frustrations.

Librarian: Yeah. And...?

Faculty: And... I can't imagine what it must *feel* like having to put up with all that pushback and pressure from all different directions. But I can empathize with you. Faculty are no strangers to policies constraining our work.

Librarian: Yeah. And...??

Faculty: And... I will also add that there could be good reasons why faculty might be short on details. First, they're new to OER, so they probably haven't even thought it through. Second, it might be a new class for them, and they don't have an existing text to reference. Or maybe they are in panic mode from their workload but wanted to shoot off a short message to start the conversation before that email exits the top of their inbox!

Librarian: I get that. And...?

Faculty: And... Yeah, those faculty need to do better.

Librarian: In the meantime, I guess we can keep motivated by focusing on the positives, like the fact that faculty are reaching out about OER in the first place.

Faculty: There you go. Do you feel... better?

Librarian: I do feel like I'll sleep less angry tonight...

Faculty: ...Great?

[Both give a weaker, half-hearted thumbs up and wink to the audience.]

Scene 6: Commitment

Faculty: [looks at his watch] We need to start wrapping up our session. Our last assignment from Dr. Jenn is to focus on *shared commitment*.

Librarian: One great example is the shared work we have been doing on our new course marking initiative. When you chose that as your capstone project for your OER Fellows program, it made me *feel*... like I have a committed partner and co-advocate on campus who shares my goals. Honestly, I know some faculty don't want to hear from *me* – again – about OER.

Faculty: And I *feel...* glad that you appreciate the project. But I also sometimes *feel...* guilty that “my project” created a bunch more work for you.

Librarian: Well, it *did!* But because we have worked so closely on OER over the years – we both knew the value and importance of getting courses marked: to allow students to make enrollment choices based on affordability and help me with tracking adoptions and assessment.

Faculty: And I really enjoy feeling like I can have an impact beyond the several dozen students per year that I teach. Working with you on the course marking project gave us the chance to impact many more students and to advocate for OER to new audiences across campus in new ways.

Librarian: Definitely. And I needed you there for our meetings with enrollment management, department chairs, and graduate school advisors, because I don't know about how classes are set up, the timeframe, and other technical aspects. I wouldn't know all the questions to ask.

Faculty: I'm glad I was able to help anticipate some of their concerns. I am nearly fluent in *department chair-ese*, after all!

Librarian: Speaking of commitment – do you want to share that conversation you had with our political science faculty recently?

Faculty: Oh yeah. We were out for drinks, and he posed the question: “What would you say to faculty who say that course materials are such a small portion of a student's overall costs, so why focus your efforts on that, when tuition, fees, and cost of living are bigger parts of the pie?” And I told him that course materials costs have outpaced tuition increased over the past few decades. And that course materials are almost the only student cost that individual faculty can directly impact. And lastly, it is not either/or. Adopting OER doesn't prevent you from also advocating for lower tuition or increased grant support.

Librarian: Those are great points. I feel like hearing it from a colleague rather than a librarian had a much stronger impact. Having faculty and administration also committed to OER work helps me feel supported and that my efforts are important. Speaking toward commitment, I also feel that finding a way to get OER initiatives into your strategic plan, whether it's at an institution level or a part of your library's plan, is also important.

Faculty: For sure. That is a great way for faculty, librarians, and administrators to come together and show commitment for OER.

[Both give yet another thumbs up and a wink to the audience.]

Scene 7: Summary and Lessons Learned

Librarian: So, where does that leave us?

Faculty: We've covered a lot of ground on things we can do to continue building and maintaining healthy librarian-faculty relationships, in support of advancing OER initiatives across campus.

Librarian: We sure have. I think one conclusion we can draw is that we both really care about students.

Faculty: And we are both really busy most of the time.

Librarian: If we can find ways to support each other and to learn from our past missteps, we will all be better off.

Faculty: We should consider each other's workflows, and if we don't know them, we can work to *get* to know them.

Librarian: And we should recognize the value and unique strengths that each of us brings to the table.

Faculty: And, whether you are a faculty member or a librarian, you definitely don't need to *marry* someone from the other side of the aisle to advance your OER agenda... But it's always an option, just saying!

Librarian: Maybe they can start with a task force, or a joint workshop or conference presentation?

Faculty: I guess so.

Librarian: The point is –

Librarian and Faculty: [facing each other, said like a catch phrase] We're both on the same team, and we both want the same thing!

[They shake hands, then turn to wave to the audience.]

Librarian and Faculty: [to the audience] Thanks!!

[END]