

Opening the Conversation: Getting Started

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Abstract: This column explores the concept of Open Educational Resources and how it relates to librarianship.

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The sentiment “OER is not my area of expertise, but I need/want to learn more; where do I start?” is one that I have heard from librarians on Twitter and at library conferences. This question speaks to the evolving nature of librarianship, how we prepare library school students, and the need for lifelong learning within our profession. OER is not taught in library school, though it is starting to show up more frequently at library conferences. Resources for librarians interested in OER are cropping up, such as this very column. Such training resources are still uncommon, however—a reality reflected by the lack of an [Accidental Librarian series](#) focusing on open educational resources librarians.

Getting started in OER can seem daunting, but the effort is worthwhile. At the heart of OER and its potential benefits is an ideal outlined in [Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which declares “everyone has a right to education” (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). This is not an abstraction. This declaration has real meaning in students’ lives. Textbook costs get in the way of students’ education and academic success. At the 2017 Annual Open Education Conference, students at Santa Ana Community College (a school with a Zero Textbook Cost Degree program) reported that they did not need to purchase textbooks, which enabled them to afford things like a parking pass for campus, a down payment for a car, and after school for their child. I asked students at my school what they would spend money on if they did not need to buy textbooks, and the answers were similar: MetroCards, bills, food. Textbook costs keep students from affording their basic needs, and when students cannot afford their basic needs, they are not able to get an education. OER takes away the cost of textbooks, thus levelling the playing field for students. Getting started with OER means rooting yourself in what is really at stake—student success, not just the rhetoric of it. Once you have done that, the resources to learn about OER are available, freely and openly.

As librarians, we are always short on time and long on resources. I have selected the following resources because they give a broad overview, and are generally well-regarded in the field of open education. None of them are completely comprehensive, but that isn't necessary in order to get started.

If you have...

- 30 minutes: Look at [Lansing Community College's Research Guide on OER](#).
- 3 hours: Scan the [SPARC OER Mythbusting](#) and [SPARC OER Annual Report](#). If you want email updates, join the [SPARC Libraries and OER Forum](#).
- 5 hours: Peruse the research available on Open on the website for the [Open Education Group](#).
- 8 hours: Read [Open: The Philosophy and Practices that are Revolutionizing Education and Science](#) and peruse [Iterating Toward Openness](#).

I encourage you to make time to go down the rabbit hole of learning about open education. Raise questions, get involved. This is a living, breathing issue, and a growing community of librarians, teachers, faculty, technologists, instructional designers, and policy experts are collaborating to create, adapt, and adopt new resources. We need to further discuss and In the next columns, we will examine funding models for OER initiatives and the range of Zero Textbook Cost initiatives, including examples of open educational resources, open alternatives, and library-subscribed resources. Please join the conversation and reach out with questions, comments, or thoughts.

References

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