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The Present and Future of OERs and TPW



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Part I: The Present at PSU and Beyond

The Present

1. At PSU--The Guide
2. Challenges and Barriers for Students and Faculty

At PSU We Authored an Instructor's *Guide*

[OER Guide for WR 227 Instructors: Using Open Educational Resources \(OERs\) in WR 227 Courses](#) Authored by Henry Covey, Sarah Read and Jordana Bowen.

Purpose: To help instructors adapt existing WR 227 courses to be less reliant on purchased texts, or to provide a framework for developing a wholly OER-based course.

Audience: WR 227 instructors at PSU and across OR. Also introductory technical and professional writing course instructors nationally.

Format: Currently an accessible PDF published via PDX Scholar.

Challenges and Barriers to OER for Students and Faculty

Based on extensive search of the broad research literature on OER adoption in higher education, we identified 5 areas of challenge:

Awareness: Do faculty and students know of, where, and how to find OERs for TPC?

Choice: Among the available OERs for TPC, how do we decide which ones to use?

Quality: How do and should OERs for TPC compare to commercial textbooks?

Efficacy: Are student learning outcomes maintained in current OERs for TPC?

Use: How do students really use, engage with, and experience current OERs for TPC?

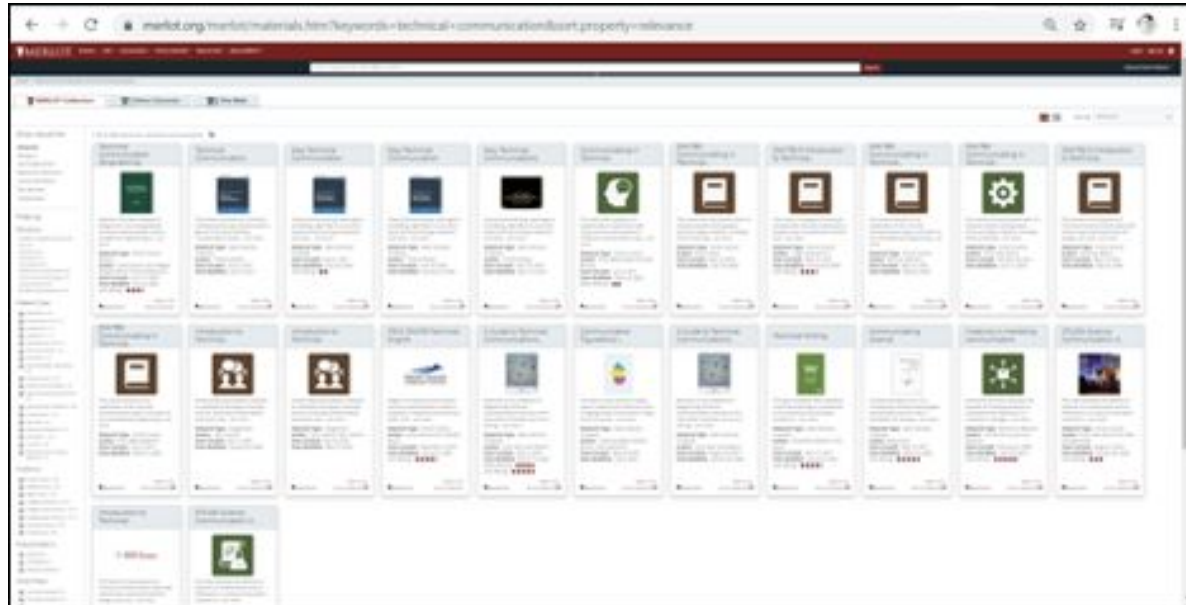
Awareness

Awareness: Do faculty and students know of, where, and how to find OERs for TPC?

- Students learn about OERs primarily from instructors after course registration and are generally pleased to not have to buy a text.
- Course scheduling systems are not yet consistent or efficient at marking courses as “OER”
- Among faculty awareness is on the rise, in part due to efforts like Open Oregon.
- Awareness among faculty ranks at about 1 in 5 faculty; however, adoption stand at more like 1 in 10 ([Seaman & Seaman, 2017](#)).

Choice

- For faculty, too much choice raises the issue of the labor to sort through and choose resources for a course.
- This screenshot shows 22 of 294 OER titles on MERLOT.org that matched the search terms “technical communication,” while “technical writing” at 221 OER titles (MERLOT, 2021).



Quality

Quality: How do and should OERs for TPC compare to commercial textbooks?

A different issue for students and instructors

For students:

- An issue of usability--ease of use and access (e.g., video, designed texts)

For faculty:

- An issue of depth and coverage of content related to their course curriculum.

Efficacy

Efficacy: Are student learning outcomes maintained in current OERs for TPC?

- A study that synthesized data from multiple studies, with combined data that represented 121,168 students and instructors, concluded that more than 95 percent of published research indicates “**OER does not lead to lower student learning outcomes,**” and “the vast majority of students and faculty who have used both OER and CT [commercial texts] believe OER are of equal or higher quality.” ([Hilton, 2020](#))
- While this news is good for OERs overall, courses are black boxes and it is impossible to isolate other factors that shape student outcomes: instructor, pedagogy, curriculum, student characteristics and contexts, technology access, etc.).
- The bottom line is that the textbook may not actually affect student learning outcomes much at all (related to use).
- Access hypothesis: “OER benefits learning by providing access to critical course materials, and therefore predicts that OER should only benefit students who would not otherwise have access to the materials” (Grimaldi et al., 2019).
- Not measuring quality of text, measuring improvement for students with low outcomes

Use

Use: How do students really use, engage with, and experience current OERs for TPC?

- Limited data does not show good news for how much students actually use textbooks, OER or not
- Faculty: *“I really struggle with whether or not to assign readings to my students. Many of them don’t learn best by reading, or just don’t do it, so it feels like I end up doing twice the work to catch them up...I usually assign it [reading] as a supplementary activity, which is part of why I don’t require a textbook that costs them a ton.”*
- Results from a study of Kennesaw State University’s technical communication OER that used Google Analytics data to paint a backend picture of OER use indicated that “many students did not use the OER,” and only “a small number of students accessed the OER regularly” and “accessed it occasionally.” All students who used the OER skimmed the contents” ([Arnett, 2018](#)).

Part II: The Future

The Future

1. Usability Research on OERs
2. Centralized Review and Repository

More research on OER usability

- For students, quality is linked to usability, or ease of use, of an OER resource.
- OER texts that do not have a good user experience for students will not be used by students
- While students may talk about the cost of OERs as their main advantage, when it comes to their actions and use of the text, usability matters much more.

Centralized Review and Access of OERs

The Dream:

- A standing professional body in TPC that reviews OERs based on Awareness, Choice, Quality, Efficacy and Use, publishes recommendations and maintains a repository of materials.
- A standing professional body whose recommendation of the OER would amount to the same level of professional credential as the publication of a textbook by a major textbook publisher (for tenure and promotion, other merit pay)

The Good News:

- Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication is working on a set of principles and a structure for review and oversight.

Thank you!

Please reach out with any comments or questions.

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