



OER SUSTAINABILITY CASE STUDY:

SUNY CANTON

Cultivating Interest in OER by Transitioning to a Faculty-led Initiative

August 2019

The State University of New York at Canton (SUNY Canton) is a public bachelor's degree granting college serving about 3,800 undergraduate students. Prior to receiving an Open Education Resources (OER)¹ grant from the SUNY system in 2017, OER did not appear to have widespread traction at SUNY Canton. The system grant sparked the on-campus initiative and interest is slowly growing.

With the initial funding, SUNY Canton focused its activities and grant resources on professional development, assembling its OER Task Force, and supporting a temporary librarian to serve as OER liaison. In fall 2018, the Task Force began accepting applications from faculty interested in developing OER courses. Five applications were received and those faculty began redesigning courses to use OER in place of paid textbooks. After the 2018 application for SUNY OER funding was complete, it was discovered that additional faculty and courses were already using OER. SUNY Canton had 38 OER course sections in fall 2018 and at least 28 OER course sections anticipated for spring 2019.

Approach and Vision

SUNY Canton's OER movement is championed by the administration and Provost because it aligns with their priorities around student access and success in the College's Strategic Plan 2020. The College serves many low-income students and OER offers a way to improve affordability, which then impacts accessibility and the College's strategic goal around optimizing enrollment. Although SUNY Canton's primary motivation for developing OER courses is to reduce student costs, the OER team hopes it will further aid accessibility goals by providing equitable access to information after students are enrolled. Ideally, OER would also change pedagogy in ways that impact student success and align with the College's strategic theme in that area.

The OER initiative is managed by the library, with the OER Campus Lead assembling an OER Task Force to guide policies and decisions around OER. The Task Force includes two faculty members from each of the College's three academic schools, and representatives from the library, online learning, and accessibility services. The faculty Task Force members will serve as the initial points of contact for faculty interested in OER as a way of providing more faculty-to-faculty education and support.

SUNY Canton kicked off its OER initiative with a professional development workshop in May, 2018 which had about 55 attendees. It featured faculty from Herkimer and Monroe Community Colleges who shared their experiences and resources. It was beneficial for SUNY Canton faculty to learn from more experienced faculty and gather examples of faculty course development. Although there is no formal recruitment plan in place, the Task Force members plan to attend faculty assembly meetings to encourage faculty adoption of OER—particularly for first-year and high enrollment courses. It's anticipated the program will grow organically through its successes, although a communication plan still must be developed.

The Task Force launched an incentive program that provides \$1,000 stipends to faculty converting courses to OER. The incentive agreement is modeled after the SUNY Fredonia agreement; it includes textbook and course materials cost disclosure forms and requires a 50% reduction in the cost of course materials. However, the stipend amount and terms of the agreement closely align with SUNY Canton's existing online course development model; it also requires that the course continue to utilize OER materials for three years. The Provost, Deans, and

¹ The information included in this case study was drawn from a team interview with 4 members of SUNY Canton's OER Sustainability Plan project team on August 30, 2018, OER documents provided by the team, and information from the SUNY Canton website.

Department Chairs all need to approve the proposed OER course development. Most faculty in the initial application phase are expected to adopt existing OER courses, particularly Lumen Learning courses, because the access fee is currently subsidized by the SUNY system. However, faculty are permitted to create their own courses materials.

The long-term vision for SUNY Canton's OER program is that it will eventually become part of the College's normal academic function, much like online learning. They do not plan to hire an OER coordinator and instead expect OER will operate as a faculty-to-faculty model with faculty Task Force members serving as points of contact. The College does not expect this model will be expensive to maintain unless the increased demand for instructional design services requires they hire additional staff. That said, as the College considers the "cost", it will need to ensure that it is fully capturing the cost of staff time reallocated to support OER.

SUNY Canton expects its stipends will phase out, and several faculty members have already created courses without the benefit of a stipend. Uncertainty remains around how the College will pay for the Lumen Learning fees if the SUNY System subsidy ends. Adding an OER course fee, general OER fee, or utilizing revenues from off-term enrollments are possibilities that may be explored once the long-term program costs are more clearly defined.

Resources and Challenges

Although interest is growing in OER, faculty resistance is the College's greatest challenge. An interview with Canton's OER project team conducted by rpk GROUP surfaced opinions that the initiative hasn't been particularly well received because it is administration-led, and faculty are more receptive to efforts advocated by other faculty members.

Misconception about OER seems to be the biggest obstacle to faculty buy-in. The OER project team indicated that some faculty have expressed concerns about the quality of OER resources; however, they expect these

concerns to diminish as familiarity improves, as occurred with online learning. Some faculty resistance was also attributed to workload and the difficulty in finding time to create new courses, especially upper-level courses with fewer pre-existing courses or materials. Other faculty may believe materials are unavailable in their discipline, or are pleased with their current materials (particularly comprehensive packages provided by publishers), or want data-driven evidence before revising their course. SUNY Canton offered a Summer Bridge program to at-risk students which utilized an OER textbook that could provide a local example of successful outcomes for students in OER courses.

The College has existing OER supports in place that are available to faculty upon request. The College has four librarians, each of whom serve as a liaison to an assigned academic area, but they have received few requests for OER support. Although the library provides online guidance on OER materials and licensing, faculty have expressed interest in additional department-level workshops and personalized support. After one-on-one meetings between faculty and librarians, SUNY Canton has already seen some progress toward the adoption of OER both practically and theoretically. For example, members of the Psychology Department were initially against the concept of using OER. After conversations and further education, the entire department began moving toward adopting OER for the Introduction to Psychology course in spring 2019.

The College also has an instructional designer and online learning staff that can provide support. They are available to assist staff with developing and loading courses into the LMS. Additional capacity may be needed in this area if OER significantly increases demand for these services.

Growing OER has been hindered by confusion about OER definitions. Some faculty are offering no-textbook courses but their materials aren't necessarily OER. The library also provides e-books for some courses, but these are not openly licensed and often faculty mistakenly believe their course is OER because the materials are free to students.

A process is in place for identifying and reporting OER courses, and students can search for OER courses on the course schedule. However, greater clarity about what is and isn't OER would improve the accuracy of the data in these systems, which eventually will separately identify low-cost courses and OER courses in the course schedule. The discovery of additional OER courses after the fall 2018 application process highlights the lack of a consistent reporting structure on campus, as well as gaps in communication between faculty and the OER Task Force Leads. The OER Campus Lead is working closely with the College Registrar to automate the reporting of OER sections for future semesters.

SUNY Canton also has another new initiative that is contributing to the confusion around OER. The College maintains a unique program where online courses developed by faculty can be leased back to the College for three years; in return, faculty receive a "shared rights" stipend of \$1,000 or less. The College is now planning to provide additional compensation for an outright purchase of selected online courses that reduce student costs by utilizing OER materials. This program is unrelated to the OER grant initiative funded by the SUNY system.

Exemplary Practice: Professional Development Support

SUNY Canton is offering a professional development program to provide faculty and staff with funding to expand and share their knowledge of OER. The program aims to: 1) encourage innovation in current instruction/programs to adopt and utilize OER; 2) encourage development of new courses or programs using OER; 3) encourage presentation of scholarly papers related to OER; and 4) assist with attendance at seminars or short courses related to OER.

Faculty and staff can request funding up to \$1,000 per year to participate in OER conferences or workshops; funding

is provided out of the SUNY OER grant. Applications are accepted four times a year and reviewed by the OER Task Force. Funding recipients are expected to provide a summary of the event, indicate how it may impact the College or their department, and present on their experiences (upon request) at a department or other College meeting.

Lessons Learned: The first application deadline for the professional development program was September 15, 2018 and one application was received. Funding was provided for a faculty member to attend the OpenEd18 conference in Niagara Falls, NY. It is too early to anticipate the level of interest the program may generate; the second application was November 15, 2018.

Looking Ahead: Sustainability Planning

SUNY Canton is in the early stages of developing its OER program. As it continues to build on its initial OER successes, priorities should include the infrastructure necessary to grow and sustain the effort and developing a communication strategy to correct much of the confusion around OER. In the proposed sustainability framework, priority areas for SUNY Canton are highlighted in blue and initial recommendations are provided below.

Infrastructure

- » Develop a faculty recruitment strategy that uses more intrusive outreach to engage faculty, particularly around first-year/high-enrollment target courses (e.g., present at department meetings; educate Deans; identify courses with high textbook prices).
- » Consider offering regular on-campus professional development opportunities for faculty to learn more about OER and available resources (e.g., monthly workshops; drop-in office hours).

- » Look at the policies and procedures created for online course development as a guide for similar documents that could be drafted for OER (e.g., process for OER course proposals, approval, reviews).

Resources

- » Identify the interim supports and services that may be required to scale the initiative while it is transitioning to the fully-embedded model envisioned.

Culture

- » Develop communication materials that address FAQs; clear up confusion between OER and no-cost courses, and distinguish between the different OER incentive programs.
- » Develop an outreach campaign to inform faculty about the library and instructional design supports that are available.
- » Leverage the knowledge of the professional development grant recipients to evangelize OER and support faculty-to-faculty recruitment.
- » Identify metrics from the SUNY Canton's Summer Bridge Program and outcomes from other SUNY colleges that inform faculty about OER's impact on student success.
- » Develop marketing/recruitment materials for faculty and administrators that highlight the program successes; draw connections to the College's strategic vision around student access and affordability.



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