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Artisanal OER: Starting from Scratch at a Small Liberal Arts College

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

The high costs of attending college are an ever-growing barrier affecting everyone involved in higher education. Textbook prices are a large part of this issue, with an 88 percent increase between 2006 and 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016) and an increase of over 1,000 percent since 1971 (NBC News, 2015). The College Board recommended that students of private four-year colleges budget \$1,240 for books and supplies in the 2019-2020 school year (College Board, 2019).

With this problem in mind, this recipe makes one campus-wide Open and Affordable Resources Council (OARC) to lead open access and textbook affordability initiatives at a small liberal arts college. It can be adapted to suit the needs of other institutions.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- A structured and ongoing initiative for leading OER activities on campus
- Reduced textbook costs for students
- Increased faculty use and creation of open access resources

NUMBER SERVED

- 10–20 council members, including librarians, teaching faculty, staff, and students

- Student body and faculty; on our campus this was about 700 students and 70 faculty
- Endless possibility of additional students and faculty from other institutions, as openly licensed resources are available for all to use

COOKING TIME

- Preparation (planning group): 1 semester
- Cook time (permanent council): Ongoing

DIETARY GUIDELINES

The Open and Affordable Resource Council identifies, plans, and implements initiatives for lowering textbook costs on campus. It consists of stakeholders from across campus who are affected by or can affect these costs, including librarians, faculty, students, and staff. Much of the council's work ties into institutional goals of sustainability and collaboration.

Goals of the OARC include education of faculty, staff, and students about open access options; promotion of open access work by campus community members; practical support for adoption and creation of open and affordable resources; and advocacy for lowering textbook costs for students.

INGREDIENTS & EQUIPMENT

- Recommended planning group members:
 - A group leader (a librarian, in our case) with advanced knowledge of open and affordable resources
 - A member of the sponsoring administrative office
 - One faculty member from each academic division
- Recommended members of permanent council:
 - Group leaders
 - Librarians (anyone working with scholarly communications and/or open access, subject liaisons, anyone else interested)
 - A member of the Dean of the College's office (or other administrator)
 - At least one faculty member from each academic division
 - At least three students
 - Anyone else interested, ideally including the following:
 - Registrar
 - Representative from tutoring/writing center (or equivalent)
 - Representative from campus bookstore
 - Representative from Disability Services (or equivalent)

- Representative from Grants & Funding (or equivalent)
- Any additional interested faculty, staff, or students, not exceeding 20 members total
- Space for meetings
- Time to meet two or three times a semester
- In group leadership, background knowledge of the following:
 - Open access/OERs/resource affordability
 - Institutional policies and practices
 - Student and faculty needs and experiences
 - State and national funding opportunities and other support

PREPARATION

1. Identify a sponsoring administrative department. In our case, this was the dean of the college, but this may vary by institution. Determine the purpose, scope, and authority of the group and its leadership.
2. Assemble a small planning group of administrators and faculty from different departments. In our case, the planning group consisted of a librarian, the associate dean of the college, and three teaching faculty. These were specifically invited to represent different divisions as well as tenured and non-tenured faculty; all had previous interest in or experience with OER.
3. Plan the creation of the permanent council. Specifics will vary based on your institution's needs and who is participating.

- For us, the planning group met several times over the course of a spring semester. Planning topics included potential members, existing OER initiatives on campus, the timeline for starting the permanent council, and particular goals and projects. The planning group came up with a name for the permanent council—the Open and Affordable Resource Council, or OARC (pronounced like the noise a seal makes)—and drafted a description, mission statement, and list of potential OARC working groups. Our preliminary ideas for working groups included education (for faculty, students, and staff), faculty support, funding, promotion, and assessment.
4. Once there is a plan, dissolve the planning group. Members may or may not choose to join the permanent council, depending on availability.
 5. Seek out members for the permanent council. We reached out to some particular stakeholders, such as the registrar and tutoring center, and also sent out an open call for participants to all faculty and staff (see appendix). Members were expected to commit for at least one year. We decided to invite student members once the council was established.

COOKING METHOD

1. With initial membership decided, find a meeting time that works for the most people and schedule an initial meeting.
2. At the first meeting:
 - a. Introduce the council's mission and purpose. Be aware that not all volun-

teers may have prior knowledge of the subject.

- b. Discuss the list of working groups created by the planning committee; revise the list based on any suggestions or feedback from members. For example, we ended up changing “Faculty Support” to more general “Campus Support.” We ended up with the following working groups:
 - Education: Provide information to Randolph College faculty, staff, and students about open access scholarship and textbook affordability options.
 - Campus Support: Provide practical support for Randolph College faculty, staff, and students on reducing textbook costs.
 - Assessment: Assess the textbook costs at Randolph and their impact on students.
 - Funding: Seek grants and other funding for open access and affordability initiatives at Randolph College. Educate and support faculty and staff in applying for funding.
 - Promotion: Publicize the work of the Open and Affordable Resource Council. Also publicize open access and affordability work done by Randolph faculty and staff.
 - i. Assign each member to at least one working group.
3. Prepare for the second meeting:
 - a. Have each member come up with specific goals for their working group(s).

- b. Seek out student participants. We asked members to nominate students and also sent out a request to all faculty to suggest names. The goal was to have several student members with a variety of experiences (commuter students, international students, majors, class years, etc.), especially those impacted by high textbook costs. We then contacted the nominated students, described the council, and invited them to participate. Three students agreed to join the OARC.
4. At the second meeting, discuss and select specific goals for each working group. Plan strategies for implementing these goals. The council leaders should be prepared to check in with working groups regularly and provide support, as they may have more knowledge on the subject than some of the members. Some example working group goals include the following:
- Assessment: Survey students regarding textbook spending and impacts.
 - Funding: Seek out grants and other funding to support the adoption, adaptation, and creation of open educational resources by college faculty.
 - Campus support: Research local options for printing open textbooks.
5. At future meetings (once or twice a semester, depending on availability):
- Check in with each working group on their progress.
 - Adapt goals as needed (revise as necessary to keep them feasible, check

off completed goals, and create new goals as needed).

- If it makes sense for your institution, write up annual reports on what the council has accomplished and share them with relevant departments and individuals.

ALLERGY WARNING

Staff departures can very easily kill projects like this unless leadership of the council is written into someone's job description. Ours is on indefinite hold due to staff departures and frozen positions.

CHEF'S NOTE

Actual ingredient measurements will depend on your campus size and the amount of interest you can garner. The planning group and council could work with fewer members or different combinations of people. The most important component is to have at least a few members who are willing and able to take on work as needed to keep the project running; anyone preparing to use this recipe should be ready to take on that role if they wish it to succeed.

APPENDIX. EXAMPLE EMAIL TO FACULTY

Call for Participants

I am writing to tell you about the Open and Affordable Resource Council, which will be starting this fall. This is a group of Randolph faculty, staff, and students devoted to encouraging the use of open access resources to lower cost barriers and improve access to

information. (See the official description, mission statement, and tentative working group ideas below.) If you are interested in being a member of the council, or just have questions about it, please let me know.

Description

The Open and Affordable Resource Council (OARC) is a group made up of Randolph College faculty, staff, and students whose goal is to encourage the use of open and affordable course materials. Issues covered include lowering the cost barriers for students, educating the Randolph community about open access scholarship, and improving the accessibility of a Randolph education.

Mission

Randolph College strives to provide an excellent education to all of today's students. This means removing cost barriers and improving accessibility wherever possible. The council will provide information on the importance of open and affordable course materials, support faculty in adopting and creating these materials, educate students on the value of open access scholarship and current scholarly communications practices, and conduct an ongoing assessment of course material costs at Randolph and their effects on students.

Working Groups

- Education: provide information to campus community on open access scholarship.
- Faculty support: help faculty learn about, select, and create open and af-

fordable course materials.

- Funding: seek grants and other funding for OARC initiatives.
- Promotion: publicize OARC activities to campus community and outside world.
- Assessment: assess textbook costs at Randolph and their effect on students.
- Others as needed.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). College tuition and fees increase 63 percent since January 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/college-tuition-and-fees-increase-63-percent-since-january-2006.htm>

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