

Presentation Notes

LPF Virtual 2020

Slide 1 *Print Pathways in OER*

- Hi All! Thank you for attending our panel, The Medium Matters: Publishing Innovations. I'll be giving my talk on Print Pathways in OER based on my experience with the State University of New York's OER Services team. It might sound a little funny that print publishing could be seen as an "innovation" but, in terms of Open Educational Resources, a response to shareability opportunities provided by the digital age, print publishing has occupied questionable space, and we're going to talk through just that.

Slide 2

Hello!

- My name is Amanda Wentworth and I am the OER Publishing Coordinator for SUNY OER Services. I was first brought onto the SOS team in a part time capacity to handle the growing print production services offered by SOS. Since then my role was expanded to full time to meet the needs of our faculty who saw value in both print and offline access options for their OER. While this initiative at SOS will be going through a transition in the near future, there are still resounding lessons that can be learned from my time in this work.

Slide 3

Do we even need print OER?

- OER is an online/digital movement; the internet is the foundation for easy resource dissemination, and is what allows these resources their trademark "free" status.
- When thinking about print OER, some of you may be thinking "isn't the print textbook industry what we're trying to dismantle? Shouldn't OER be about innovative technology that liberates students from conventional learning techniques such as print? Do we *even need* print OER?"
- It's important for me to point out that I don't necessarily disagree with these thoughts, as I really do think they're a basic building block and aspirational motivation for open education. The simple answer is, "all online is not for all." We can't simply pretend that students are where we want them to be as learners, solely digital learners, or ignore all of the factors of the current educational landscape and technology that might be influencing our students, as well as our instructors, to prefer print.
- As far as instructors are concerned, print OER can accomplish a variety of goals, including but not limited to:

- Allowing for in-class participation when an instructor wants to avoid allowing internet-enabled technology into the classroom
- Lowering “OER anxiety” in instructors who are still grasping or getting comfortable with the idea of OER and teaching with them. There’s something comforting and familiar about working out of a paper-bound textbook that is reliably *there* regardless of internet or digital literacy, or battery life. If offering this version of OER textbooks to instructors who would otherwise be unwilling to try OER is one way for us to expand this movement, then it should be taken seriously.
- For students, access to print OER textbooks means:
 - First and foremost, offline access — no internet, no problem. In fact, for some students, not being on a machine with internet availability is essential to focus.
 - While there can be a benefit to students having textbook material written by their own professors, things can get awkward when they have to spend big bucks on that material, especially when that results in suspicion and resentment over royalties.
 - Also, they can annotate by hand — highlight and scribble in the margins — without worrying about anyone else seeing it.
 - Which leads to another key reason... being able to retain ownership of their textbooks, successfully avoiding the false salvation of renting.

Slide 4

Post-Covid Print OER?

- I want to take a brief moment to address the looming backdrop to our virtual conference today and how it relates to my talk, as there are clear and resounding ramifications that cannot be overlooked.
- Clearly we need to reframe our initial understanding, being that “All online is not for all... except for when it is.” Students and instructors currently don’t have a choice about whether or how learning needs to continue remotely while the world faces this crisis. This new reality demands that we rethink some of our old stances and privileges and consider what is truly at stake for learners everywhere, of all sorts of backgrounds and means.
- So, what transfers?
 - The most obvious issue that print OER addresses in direct relation to the struggles many students are facing during emergency remote learning is offline access. Plenty of students who previously had the benefit of campus-provided internet have been forced to finish their semesters away from that reliability. Let’s also keep in mind the students who were already facing this difficulty; in her talk on the Copyright and Open Education Strategies Webinar series, SPARC’s Nicole Allen captured this scenario nicely in her remark: “Some of the things that were once invisible have become visible.”

- Additionally, the retention of ownership issue is enthusiastically carried through in this particular scenario. We've all been hearing about the temporary flexibility of some conventionally copyrighted material, including offering some resources that are usually behind strict paywalls for free. While this might be the best option for instructors and students right now to relieve some of the most urgent pressures brought on by this pandemic, we need to remember that these are not long-term solutions and students and instructors will lose access to this generosity once this time comes to a close.

Slide 5

To rent or not to rent?

This retention of ownership issue makes me think about the temporary balm that is renting and the issues that are often overlooked in favor of up-front savings.

- A friend of mine is going for her masters in biochemistry and had rented all of her biochem textbooks when she was an undergrad, and was now in the position of having to re-rent exceedingly similar material. "If only I had known that those books were going to be useful to me, I might have just bought them to save me money down the road," she said. As an undergraduate student, she wasn't thinking about tackling her masters when faced with the option of buying a \$300 textbook versus renting one for \$150. All this to say, maybe renting isn't the godsend that rental companies tout it to be; maybe the lower price tag on renting is a distraction from the real issues underlying those prices in the first place.
- A rental textbook, therefore, does not mean "cheap" for a few reasons. If a student misses a return deadline, BAM, fee. If they need an access code? Renting won't be an option. Even if they can find the textbook as a rental, they'll still need to purchase the access code separately which, on its own, can still be pricey.

Slide 6

SOS Print Initiative

- SUNY OER Services decided to take this ask seriously and explored print pathways in OER in order to support our faculty in the most comprehensive way possible. So, in 2017, the SOS print pilot was started by Allison Brown and Laura Murray to offer a sophisticated print solution for SUNY faculty.

Slide 7

SOS's motivations for print

- At a basic level, our motivations for print rested in two specific areas: to facilitate offline access and to meet students' print preferences.
 - Offline Access could mean both print as well as other downloadable formats. Many of the students in the SUNY system live in areas with surprisingly low broadband internet access, so when they are not at campus their internet access

could be spotty. These are the commuter students who spend up to 12 hours a day on campus in order to finish their online work as well as do their online studying.

- Regarding print preferences among students: A 2019 study explored the enduring trend of student print preferences amongst undergraduate students of all ages, finding that, on average, students who had access to print textbooks rather than digital spent more time studying and engaging with their textbook than their fellow students with access to only digital. While digital textbook students enjoyed easy skimming and content search capabilities, which likely played a not insignificant role in how long they engaged with the content, print textbook students were grateful for the ease of use, readability, portability, and hand to paper highlighting/notetaking capabilities of their print course content.

Slide 8

Robin's Tweet

- In my research of both formal studies and social sentiments, there is a general assumption that all college material should be digital, as today's students — implying "the youths" — don't have an interest in or use for print material. While not directly related to this assumption, this tweet by Robin DeRosa in August deeply resonated with me as I grappled with my own feelings about these sentiments.
- College students are not kids. Youths are not robots. Learning is diverse.

Slide 9

SOS resources

- In my experience over the course of this initiative, I've been asked to "give advice" about how other campuses or other systems can do the work that I've done. In that time, the best thing I could do for people interested in providing this service to their students is communicate what resources I've been afforded in order to give people a sense of what they might advocate for in their own institution and context.
- While SOS undertook this initiative, this is what was utilized:
 - A PB instance that requires specialty plugins and add-ons that we use to create our print-ready PDFs
 - ISBNs through the SUNY Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS)
 - There was a partnership with our university Press, from which we gained invaluable experience as well as resources.
 - The most important resource provided by our press was access to our print on demand vendor, LightningSource. LS is a subgroup of Ingram, and they provided us with print on demand — which has been a fundamental aspect of our print service — as well as an ease of ordering for our campus bookstores. Bookstores simply provided Ingram with the ISBNs for our books in their typical ordering process.

- And, finally, SOS had me, a dedicated fulltime employee. Starting and maintaining this kind of service takes work, and I couldn't imagine doing it off the side of my desk, which I know is the position that many of the people attempting to start this work are.

Slide 10

SOS books image — The one on top is an original work created by a SUNY Westchester professor.

Slide 11

Challenges

- Let's talk about the challenges associated with providing a print production service for a state university system.

Slide 12

Pricing & affordability

- Here's the obvious obstacle. Print is not free.
- On top of the basic costs of paper, ink, binding, paying people to do that, etc, there are some additional barriers to what we would consider true affordability, which, when we started, we considered to be books under \$40.
- At the beginning of this pilot our service was strictly restricted to black and white prints, but, as time has gone on, we found more and more faculty who prefer their books to be in color, which is, clearly, an added cost. While we continued to encourage our faculty to avoid color, reassuring and reminding them that color will be available to students in the online versions, we realized that by not providing color options, we turned off faculty who would otherwise enthusiastically work with us.
- There's also the page count. Our print vendor bases the retail price of our books primarily on how long the books are, which, as you can imagine, can be really, really long. These are often digital texts that are converted to PDF, and it can be really surprising how long they can turn out. Digital space is much more vast than physical space, and when we have faculty who either are convinced that they need ALL that digital text in a print book or who aren't interested in deciding what content to cut for a print version, that can become a huge cost.
- We would do our very best to keep costs down for students as much as we possibly could, and a big part of that, for us, was to make sure we weren't making any real money on these books. LS has a publisher compensation option when setting the retail price of your books, which we set to as close to zero as possible without running the risk of going into the red.
- Finally, a persistent challenge was thinking about sustainability and longevity for this service. Ultimately, SUNY is transitioning away from providing this service in the same

way it had been for the last two years, and it will be interesting to see how a university press like SUNYs will adapt this service to its own publishing process.

Slide 13

Streamlined process

- While it's ideal to have a perfectly seamless streamlined process for a print service, these are some things to keep in mind:
 - Every print order is unique and can present learning curves
 - First of all, PDF creation is not always straightforward. If the faculty placing a print request submits a source file that is in an inaccessible format and/or need a lot of cleanup itself before it can be converted to the kind of PDF that can be uploaded to the printer, the time it takes to remediate these issues must be taken into account. Once a print-ready PDF is developed, it must then be sent back to the author or faculty to review before sending off to print, which can result in some additional back and forth before it is ready.
 - After this process is finished, the print coordinator would then need to coordinate with the print vendor, in our case Lightning Source, in order to get the book ready and available for bookstores to order.
 - Once the title is available, and the price is set to adjust for the roughly 30% markup that bookstores are accustomed to applying to their books, they need to be notified that the title is ready. Bookstores are a key player in this game, as students who order their bookstores from this source are able to use their financial aid.

Slide 14

Results

Slide 15

Since 2017...

This slide shows some of the results SOS has seen from its print and general OER initiatives. As you can see, we've produced a total of 75 print textbooks in this time as well. According to SUNY bookstore sales reports, about 47% of SUNY students have bought our books.

- Anecdotally, students who don't buy print OER probably aren't buying anyway, or it has to do with the fact that most OER print textbooks are not required, as they're available online, so the students who are buying represent those who have a genuine need or desire for print options.

Slide 16

Amazon offerings

- Lightning Source also gave us the option to expand distribution outlets, including Amazon, which allowed the books to be discoverable to interested parties outside of SUNY.

Slide 17

Future

- Who knows where print textbooks will end up?
- We need to be flexible with how trends change for students.

Slide 18

Battle between digital & print?

- While some say, “We need to encourage students to utilize digital books and learning tools over print,” others will say. “We need to meet students where they’re at.” In my opinion, both point of views are valid, and together, we should be saying, “We need to address the systemic issues that burden students either way.”

Slide 18

Thanks!