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Gap Analysis: Equity Through OER Rubric Pilot Project

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About the Gap Analysis

The [Equity Through OER Rubric](#) includes three broad organizational categories, each with their own set of dimensions, all of which are essential to build and sustain capacity. The categories represent not only areas of focus and engagement, but also stakeholder communities that sometimes intersect in terms of practice and responsibility: Students, Practitioners, and Leadership/Administrators. Within these categories, rubric users are asked to engage and evaluate themselves along a set of key dimensions and the individual categories in them.

The purpose of the Gap Analysis is to conduct a deep dive into the rubric and its embedded components, assess your stage of adoption and where you are in each of the dimensions and categories, and identify what will be needed to advance in each area: conditions; resources, both human and financial; stakeholder engagement; intentional change management processes, risk mitigation, and more.

The gap analysis is designed to set you up for developing your action plan, which will include strategies, actions, and resources needed to move your institution or system to a more advanced stage of OER adoption.

Sharing the Document

As a project deliverable, the Gap Analysis will be shared with the DOERS3 Equity Work Group, the DOERS3 Steering Committee, and the Hewlett Foundation (if requested). It will not be made public unless you decide to do so. You are free to share your gap analysis with stakeholders at your institution or system.

Initial Reflections

Please take some time to reflect on your system or institution's context and experience with OER and open education.



Initial Overall Assessment

In a few sentences, summarize how you and your team feel about your institution or system's awareness of and involvement with equity in OER and open education.

A growing number of members of the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) community are taking an interest in OER and open education. Surveys of the UNC faculty in 2018 and 2021 indicated a threefold increase in awareness of OER during that 3-year span (<https://libguides.unco.edu/OERcommittee/OERatUNC>). UNC faculty engage with OER in varied ways and for many different reasons, from wanting more control over course materials, to enhancing teaching, to saving students money, to increasing student academic success, and to contributing to a sustainable and open publishing model. The impact on equity is one reason that some UNC community members are engaged with OER in their teaching and their work. Some individuals in the University of Northern Colorado community are aware that open educational resources address equity issues in removing the cost barriers from materials. However, our institution has never formally studied or attempted to articulate and connect our diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) [initiatives](#) with our [affordable and open educational resources \(AOER\) initiatives](#).

Areas of Concern

In a few sentences, describe the major areas of concern and major challenges for your institution or system with implementing and/or improving an equity-focused OER program.

One major challenge for the University of Northern Colorado is moving our course markings project forward so that it is accurate and complete. It is a Colorado state mandate that students know how much their course materials will cost when they register for classes. The Associate Provost and Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Studies has directed that the course markings project go through the textbook adoptions process with our Follett bookstore. The bookstore has indicated that it does not have the staff needed to provide all the support needed to make this process accurate. Related to this issue, we struggle to determine how many instructors are using OER beyond the state support grant stipend funding that we have received since 2018. There has been turnover in the bookstore management. The current bookstore manager has been responsive to questions and is willing to serve on the Affordable and Open Educational Resources (AOER) course markings subcommittee.

The course marking challenge is a good example of a systemic issue with the promotion of OER as a strategy for improving equity: Adoption of OER is only one of many strategies to improve equity, and equity is only one of many reasons to consider using OER. However, for OER to be a successful strategy for improving equity, there needs to be widespread and consistent buy-in. A major challenge with the course markings, for example, is that our system requires individual faculty to submit course material information. Even for faculty who are passionate about promoting equity, submitting course material information might be low on their list of priorities and as such does not receive their attention. As a result, UNC students are not receiving the



most accurate information about course materials costs, although the process is improving due to the work of the UNC AOER committee.

Another area of concern is the rise of “inclusive access” programs in the state of Colorado. Recently, the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs adopted such a program as a campus-wide initiative (<https://homepage.uccs.edu/taap>). The Colorado Department of Higher Education OER Council is currently working on a stance and approach regarding such institutional-wide opt out programs. It is important to know to what extent UNC departments are using such inclusive access programs. Understanding cost savings from these programs, as well as gaining insight into interest in and potential growth of these types of programs is important. Information on inclusive access programs will help those involved in our campus OER initiative to be proactive in addressing issues with inclusive access programs, as well as be proactive in sharing the pros and cons of such programs with others. We envision gathering this information via our campus course marking project.

Gap Analysis

1. Students

This section focuses on equitable Availability of OER, Access to Technology, and Student Awareness of OER leading to equitable student access, outcomes, and success.

1.1 Availability of OER

Describe your system or institution’s current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: It is pretty clear we are still in the *Beginning* category, even if we are meeting some of the markers for the next higher *Emerging* category. Specifically, we are not aware of efforts to engage specific populations of students with OER, or to improve offline access to OER (although it is unclear whether this is needed for our student populations).

Achieve:

- A course marking system that works and is current. We note that making OER the “required” course materials is just one method of using OER for equity and student success. Thus, beginning a project to align Liberal Arts Core (LAC) courses, UNC’s general education program, with supplemental OER materials could be highly valuable.
- Analyze the use of OER from the fall and spring course markings report. To achieve the above goals, we will need information from Information Management & Technology (IMT), the AOER Course Markings Subcommittee, the Student Success Offices, and the Bookstore.



1.2 Access to Technology

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: This is difficult to assess based on the rubric. While anecdotally, faculty who adopt OER seem to assume that students in their classes will have sufficient access to technology, the issue has not been considered specifically as part of our OER initiatives. Generally, faculty assume students can access technology, and the university has programs to assist with this, including a number of loaner laptops (the Libraries currently have 150 laptops in circulation), on-campus computer labs, and acceptable on-campus broadband access. These programs were improved during the university's response to COVID-19, but we have not undertaken a systematic study of student access concerns.

Achieve:

- Work with IMT to gather and evaluate statistics on student access to technology (laptops, wireless, etc.).
- Look for data about availability of internet access for students in marginalized groups.
- All UNC students have access to technology (and therefore to OER) (library laptops, 24/7 labs on campus, other options) and that students are aware of all of their options to access technology.

1.3 Student awareness of OER

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: *Beginning.* The use of OER varies between academic programs, so we believe student awareness of OER varies accordingly. However, we have not conducted a systematic study of current student awareness of OER. As we describe elsewhere in this gap analysis, we are evolving a course marking system that will raise awareness when students register, since they will often be able to see whether a course uses OER or commercial course materials.

Achieve:

- Analyze marketing materials.
- Gather information and collaborate with the registrar's office, student advisors, student success, and marketing.
- Ensure there is a marketing plan to students at registration, advising and that OER is included in a formal institutional level marketing plan.
- Create interest in OER in the student body by reinstating a student representative to the UNC AOER Committee.
- Improve the "Cost of Attendance" tool to reflect the possibility of OER use; currently the calculator gives a standard \$1200 per year cost of textbooks and supplies, noting that



this amount can widely vary (<https://www.unco.edu/financial-aid/how-aid-works/student-budgets.aspx>). Ideally, we would develop a calculating tool for how much courses will cost and the average costs of textbooks and course materials for students at UNC.

- Students are informed of data privacy aspects of automated textbook purchasing programs and other course materials options.
- Continue to survey students on their awareness of OER.

This section focuses on equity-centered Instruction & Pedagogy, Content, and multiple dimensions of Infrastructure, including Staff Support, Course Markings, IT Support, and Bookstores—all designed to build practitioner capacity institution-wide in terms of equity-centered OER engagement and expansion leading to equitable student access, outcomes, and success.

The Leadership & Accountability section below also includes attention to support for instructors, professional development, and academic policy like tenure and promotion, focused on those with decision-making authority and responsibility. The focus in this section is on the practice side of instruction and pedagogy.

2.1 Instruction and Pedagogy

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: We are somewhere between *Beginning* and *Emerging*, probably closer to the latter. As the rubric indicates, there are a variety of considerations in this category, and we meet the standards for different categories depending on the context.

- An increasing number of faculty are implementing inclusive pedagogy and participating in DEI development opportunities. These are usually more general than the use of OER specifically, but OER is included as one strategy for improving inclusive pedagogy.
- For the last four years, faculty have had financial and technical support for adopting OER in their classes through grants stemming from the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). Faculty who have applied for these grants often cite inclusive pedagogy as among their motivations for pursuing OER. Participants in this program have represented a diverse range of faculty identities, although this has not been a main consideration in distributing the grants. There has been enough funding to support all faculty who are interested.
- We acknowledge that an advantage of OER is that it can improve culturally and ability-inclusive content, although we have no evidence that this factor has been the deciding one when selecting OER in any widespread effort.
- There are not specific inclusions of OER in the tenure and promotion process (nor are there widespread adoption of DEI metrics), but some units have promoted faculty who have engaged with OER and used it as evidence for effective instruction.



Achieve:

- The university is committed to improving DEI on campus, so there will continue to be effort put to these matters.
- From an OER perspective, we should strive to ensure OER is a highlighted component of the DEI work done by faculty at the university.
- A specific strategy to address this work is to include OER and inclusive pedagogy as part of the faculty evaluation criteria. These criteria are developed by each individual academic unit (with approval of the provost) so there is work to be done to achieve this goal.

2.2 Content

2.2.a Quality of OER content

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: *Not Present.* OER adoption is almost entirely led by individual faculty who assess quality using their disciplinary expertise. The University Libraries provides suggestions for how to evaluate and review OER on their OER online guide, although cultural responsiveness, relevance and inclusiveness, accessibility and inclusive design are not among the suggestions for how to evaluate a resource.

However, it is not clear that this is an area where we should adopt university-wide quality standards. Faculty should have authority over the course resources and how they align to the course learning outcomes; this is what drives innovation and even allows for the adoption of OER in most cases. It is unclear whether using an OER that allows more students access to course materials should be abandoned for an expensive commercial textbook that proports to meet some inclusive quality standards.

Achieve:

- Even if we do not wish to pursue moving to the right on this metric, there would be value in creating an online guide for how to evaluate course materials on the basis of cultural responsiveness. At the very least, such a guide would highlight the reality that many OER provide an opportunity for improved quality standards.

2.2.b OER Across the Curriculum

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.



Current state: *Beginning.* The CDHE state grants to incentivize OER adoption have targeted General Education course adoption, with mixed success. There is awareness among faculty passionate about OER that adopting OER in these classes can have a large impact on students. However, these are often the instructors who are hardest to convince, especially since they are the prime target of commercial textbook representatives.

Recent efforts in this area appear to be paying dividends. Analysis of data gathered by UNC's Liberal Arts Council shows that almost a third of courses in UNC's Liberal Arts Curriculum (LAC) use free or OER materials (34/104 courses, and another 18 courses not requiring textbooks through the bookstore). Every required category in the LAC includes courses that use OER, so a student could complete their general education requirements without the need to purchase any commercial textbooks.

Outside of the LAC, some departments have made efforts to adopt OER broadly, but more data must be gathered to understand our success on this metric.

Achieve:

- Courses in the LAC are a prime target for adoption of OER, and the AOER committee can do more to encourage adoption. Since most general education courses are in subjects that have quality OER available, we can create an online guide for faculty and students of what resources are available. The guide will both educate faculty about possible textbooks to adopt and provide students with alternative course materials in the case they cannot afford the required textbooks or simply could benefit from additional resources.

Once we have a more reliable source of data from the course marking project, we should publish an annual report of OER use on campus, highlighting departments that are leaders in OER use and celebrating the increasing pathways through the LAC that require no commercial textbooks to complete.

2.3 Infrastructure

2.3.a Staff Support

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: *Emerging.* The Textbook Affordability Librarian faculty position is currently vacant, and the Libraries put this vacancy forward as a priority to fill among our vacant positions. The campus level Affordable and Open Educational Resources Committee remains vital and is accomplishing various goals related to its standing charge by the provost. There are no instructional designers specifically dedicated to OER support, although Instructional Design and Development (IDD) has representation on the AOER committee.



Achieve:

- Fill the Textbook Affordability Librarian position.
- Explore the creation of an Open Educational Resources Office or director of OER position (as they have at other universities) in Academic Affairs or Student Success (perhaps half time or in collaboration with DEI office).

2.3.b Course Marking Responsibility

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: We are clearly in the *Emerging* category here, with room to grow. UNC has worked on this project since the state of Colorado mandated a course marking mandate in 2018. A member of IMT has worked closely with the registrar staff and the bookstore to develop a system, which continues to evolve.

Achieve:

- Current, complete, and accurate data about how much course materials cost students available in our course schedule and catalog.
- Publicize course materials costs to students.

2.3.c Infrastructure IT Support

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: *Beginning*. There is ad-hoc support for OER among IMT staff, but no broad efforts to promote OER through IMT. Better support for OER-adjacent technology is needed, as is improved integration to Canvas. There are no IMT staff members formally dedicated to supporting AOER initiatives.

Achieve:

- Work with IMT to make OER tools available in Canvas by default.
- IMT and IDD explicitly support OER platforms.
- Create and publicize to faculty a list of free tools that integrate into Canvas, Canvas Commons, standard course template that IDD provides, page with resources.
- Creation of an online guide on how to find supplemental materials for your courses, so instructors see it.

2.3.d Bookstore Engagement

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.



Current state: *Beginning.* Most of the engagement with the bookstore has been closely tied with the course markings project. The bookstore's participation with the AOER Committee has varied since 2018 from being an active committee member, to completely non-communicative, to somewhere in between. There is room to improve the process and procedures for course markings, so students have an accurate picture of how much their course materials will cost, and we can track OER use by faculty, and metrics such as passing rates in OER courses.

Achieve:

- The bookstore offers print-on-demand versions of OER textbooks available upon faculty request.
- The bookstore lists alternative OER resources or provide links to resources from their website.
- Improve the bookstore's process of contacting faculty.

3. Leadership & Accountability

While leadership should be understood broadly and responsibility for equity is required across all dimensions of the rubric, this section focuses on decision-makers who have not only responsibility, but also accountability for ongoing assessment and continuous improvement, including strategic planning and budgeting, OER-Equity goal setting, policy, staffing, infrastructure, instructor incentives, professional development and faculty tenure and promotion recognition. The overarching goal remains equitable student access, outcomes, and success.

3.1 Ongoing Assessment: Quantitative and Qualitative

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: Currently at the *Beginning and Emerging levels* (we have done some but not all of the points in each category). Assessment has been piece meal. The Libraries Head of Scholarly Communication department conducted a research project that showed course sections that used OER had higher passing rates and completion rates for all student demographics, than course sections that do not use OER.

Achieve:

- Find which data and reports are available to us to understand our OER foundation. This includes student success markers for courses, DEI, enrollment to match OER courses.
- Run reports providing counts of how many courses are using free options or options lower than \$20.
- Analyze course markings reports for courses from fall 2022 and their textbook information and identify LAC courses with OER or no materials listed.



- Assign assessment to one body (potentially the AOER Assessment Subcommittee, with input on which questions to answer guided by the AOER Committee)
- Gain accuracy of data so we can confidently answer how much money UNC students are actually being saved.
- Set the groundwork for additional research projects related to AOER and UNC students.
- Work with institutional research to develop a dashboard that pulls in a final report for course markings for each semester publicly available textbook cost, all courses without textbook assigned x multiple students x textbook cost average = how much we saved.

3.2 Continuous Improvement: Leadership Commitments

Describe your system or institution's current state within this rubric category, specific gaps to improve within this category if applicable, and what you would like to achieve in the future.

Current state: *Emerging.* There exists general interest and support from campus leadership. For example, a past provost provided supplemental funding to our grant program in order to incentivize instructors to transform a course from using commercial materials to using open educational resources.

Achieve:

- A free to students Liberal Arts Core pathway at UNC
- Affordable and OER are included as student success strategies in official university documents. Ex. Hispanic Serving Institution Steering Committee planning, Rowing not Drifting strategic plan objectives, the student enrollment management plan, the college student success priorities, and Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategic priorities.

Concluding Reflections

As you work through the rubric to evaluate yourself in the Gap Analysis, we encourage project teams to reflect on the rubric itself as an openly licensed tool to be adapted and revised. Ideally, you will reflect on and capture your interactions with the rubric throughout the grant year. As you complete the gap analysis by rubric dimensions and categories, please consider addressing the following questions:

What surprised you about your gap analysis? Were there some helpful discoveries or anything you found confusing?

One thing we found very helpful with the gap analysis is that it is getting us to think about specific actions we might take in specific areas, rather than just “Hmm, how can we get more people to adopt OER?”



Since we are using an equity rubric, it helped us think about open educational resources on our campus in terms of the two concepts of equality and equity. The following description of equality and equity seems to be a widely shared concept of the two concepts, “Equality in education is necessary for students to have the same opportunities to start off with positive educational outcomes, and equity helps to make sure those equal opportunities are adjusted to make room for students who might need extra help and attention.” ([NSHSS blog post](#), May 11, 2021) When considering OER on our campus through the equity lens, we realize that students having equal access to OER is important, but what are the equity implications—what does it mean for students who “might need extra help and attention.” Perhaps this means we focus our OER efforts, so we are not furthering inequities by growing the use of OER on our campus.

It became clear to us how many different units from across campus will continue to need to be involved and work together to move our AOER initiative forward. Not only that, but we need more people in paid positions; so much of our work in this area is added to full time responsibilities in other areas and the work is at times invisible labor.

What might you add, expand, or remove from the rubric or this gap analysis exercise?

The rubric focuses on OER, our campus is increasingly having more conversations around both OER and affordable (library resources, free to students resources, low-cost resources <\$20). It may be helpful to determine how affordable and free to students materials fits or complements OER.

Under the leadership section, we are asked to assess the level of assessment of OER, but most of the rubric items require the authors of the gap analysis to assess our use of OER. Perhaps something about our level of confidence in each rubric item would be helpful, especially when we score low on the assessment measure.

What else would you like to share about either the gap analysis or the rubric?

The rubric is very broad in each category. In most elements, there were some markers that we meet in the Beginning category, and other in the Emerging or even Established category. Breaking up the rubric areas further might be more helpful to flesh out each point on rubric.

While each area of evaluation might result in improvements, it would be helpful for us as a campus to make strategic decisions about where to put our resources. Simply moving to the right on each area is not a good strategy for increasing OER and equity outcomes. We must prioritize the things on rubric that we hope have the broadest impact.



In a few sentences, please describe the next steps you and your team will take to address issues found within your gap analysis.

We probably need to have more accurate data on where we actually stand in each area, so establishing systems to gather reliable data for each category is an important next step.

We believe there are a number of achievable ideas we have described above in this analysis that we can strive to implement for the next year as part of the AOER committee. In particular, rubric items we think are areas where we can make tangible improvements reside in 1.3 student awareness, 2.2b OER across the curriculum, 2.3b course marking, 3.1 ongoing assessment and 3.2 Leadership commitments. In this sense, the exercise of this gap analysis was very helpful.