37TH ACADEMIC CHAIRPERSONS CONFERENCE - Proposal

Title of presentation: Building Faculty Community via OER

Primary presenter information and short biographical sketch:

Jörg Waltje, Ph.D.
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Jörg Waltje is the Executive Director of the Center for Faculty Excellence at Texas Woman's University. He leads and directs the Center's programs and services focusing on faculty development and academic excellence. He works closely with faculty and institutional leaders to collaboratively assess needs, develop programming, and evaluate strategies to enhance the knowledge and skills of faculty in achieving their goals related to teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership.

Additional presenter information:

Amanda Zerangue, M.L.S, J.D
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Amanda Zerangue is Manager of Digital Services and the Scholarly Communication Librarian at Texas Woman's University Libraries. Amanda facilitates the digital scholarship services for the TWU community, specifically within the areas of Open Educational Resources, scholarly publications and copyright, and licensing.

Best Practice Presentation (45 mins)

Disciplines

Selected:

Education
Educational Leadership
Higher Education Administration
Education Economics
Higher Education and Teaching
Disability and Equity in Education
Curriculum and Instruction

Abstract for program and website (25-50 words):

This presentation will delineate ways for chairs and college administrators to encourage faculty to explore better and less costly ways to deliver instructional content to their students. It will highlight how to reward and recognize these efforts, while at the same time creating excellent opportunities for faculty collaborations and community building.

Keywords:

Faculty Development, Faculty Collaboration, OER, Accessibility, Inclusiveness, Student Outcomes, Overcoming Financial Barriers to HE.

Description of the session (300-500 words):

Easing the monetary burden today's students face due to textbook costs is the most immediate benefit associated with using Open Educational Resources (OER) in the college classroom. In discussions this factor often rises to the top because both students and instructors are very cognizant of the added financial burden, the annual increase in textbook costs, and the mirrored exponential rise in debt our students are facing.

But there is much more to it: High textbook prizes manifest themselves as a barrier to educational equity and accessibility for many. Some students feel they cannot afford to purchase all of the required textbooks, others defer or skip taking a course due to high textbook costs. Indeed, some students are already falling behind on Day 1 because they have to decide between buying food, paying rent, or having a textbook in the first weeks of class. Often, more basic needs win out, especially when the budget is tight and financial aid has not arrived yet. Easing the burden of textbook costs by using OER is an immediate pathway to ensure textbook accessibility for all.

The scholarly literature shows that especially students from historically underserved and less privileged groups tend to have much better academic success and lower withdrawal rates when they are enrolled in courses which use open textbooks than those of their peers who use traditional and often very costly textbooks. Encouraging faculty to transition to low or no cost OER textbooks has not only the potential to have a positive impact on attracting students to an institution or a particular department (and on retaining them!), but also on building a faculty community by encouraging collaborative projects.

Our presentation will delineate ways for chairs and college administrators to encourage their faculty to explore better and less costly ways to deliver instructional content to their students, and how to reward and recognize these efforts. The easiest entry point are foundational and core classes, but the concept also applies to more advanced and specialized courses. It is important to point out to faculty that they will not have to shoulder the burden all by themselves – and that the department or college is eager to support the development of alternatives to high-cost textbooks by providing the resources necessary to adopt, adapt, or

create OER materials.

At our own institution we were able to make a lot of headway by creating a collaborative initiative that had the support from upper administrators, was relatively inexpensive to implement, and resulted in student savings of almost $350,000 in its first semester.

This interactive presentation will discuss our initiative in detail and offer up our *modus operandi* as a possible template for chairpersons and administrators at other institutions. Encouraging faculty to work in cahoots, and to collaborate and ponder how a whole department can best help their students achieve better outcomes turned into a fine opportunity to build a campus-wide community that began to cherish an ongoing conversation about teaching and student engagement.

References

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Valuable Resources

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