Developing discipline-specific and Collaborative OER communities
AKA "An OER Community for my Discipline"

OTN Summit Breakout Group #3 - July 26, 2019
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Participants / Contributors: Anonymous

SUMMARY

- Several people expressed interest in developing collaborative groups that are discipline-specific
- Individuals will need assistance in scoping out their groups and the purpose of their groups
- Some asked if participation (in said discipline-specific groups) would be limited to institutions which are OTN members. I don't know the answer to that question
- Others (in both discussions) asked about formation of INTER-disciplinary groups. A point which is notable and important.
- Members of the discussions would like the opportunity to form working groups and (I perceive) coaching to be successful in setting and reaching goals.
- Such groups could eventually be embedded in existing disciplinary societies, or could be parallel to existing disciplinary societies.

Pre-discussion description

Collaboration is a key feature of OER but it requires a lot of coordination to develop discipline-specific communities to collaboratively author, create ancillaries, and meet up to discuss practices that are working well. Are OTN folks interested in developing discipline-specific and collaborative OER communities, and if so, what have OTN people already done in this area and how could we build on it?

A lot of OER authors choose to "go it on their own" and end up burned out and with a book that is not as good as it could be if they were working in a team (teams bring diverse perspectives, challenges to methods, different strengths, etc.) Solo authors also learn a lot less from peers and lose out on the encouragement of a team and the opportunity to learn/think through different ways of teaching their course. Those of us who are working with authors who want to publish are working to ensure rigor and high quality learning resources. We also see needs to discuss about pedagogy in the development process. I think that OTN could make substantive contributions in this area and would like to know about others' thoughts and experiences on this topic … and if people want to work together.

Link to video invitation to OTN Summit attendees for 7/26 discussion:
https://youtu.be/9U3AZTzkpC4

FOCUS OF 7/26 DISCUSSION

Guiding questions [refined]:

1. Is there a future for open-related collaborations between discipline-specific people (or interdisciplinary-focused people) from different institutions?
2. If so, what opportunities and barriers exist? For which problems are such collaborations promising?
3. Will you propose a working group so that open education-minded people from various disciplines can connect with each other and further explore what collaboration in open education across disciplines might look like?

PARTICIPANTS

Group 1: 10 people. Six faculty/subject matter experts representing geography, economics, math and social work, and four administrators / librarians / instructional designers.

Group 2: 8 people. All administrators / librarians / instructional designers.

PROCESS

Approach: “This is your group” and 1,2,4,all (.e.g think, pair, share with 4, all discuss)
Definition: Disciplinary collaboration: Collaboration on anything within a discipline
Definition: Collaboration: Defined as two or more people working together on any purposeful activity in any modality (face to face, virtual, etc.)
Definition: Scope of content: Defined as OER [and open education, open pedagogy] not just open textbooks.
Definition: Primary roles of faculty: planning, preparing resources for and facilitating student learning. Research. Outreach. Committee work.
Prompt for individual work: Using one idea per sticky note, list problems that could be solved or opportunities that could be leveraged/realized by collaboration within disciplines [across multiple institutions].

FINDINGS

There are significant reasons for development of discipline-specific (and inter-disciplinary/multidisciplinary) networks or communities with emphasis or focusing on OER and/or open education. Some subject-matter experts expressed interest in forming working groups and further exploring the potential or roles of such groups.

General benefits of collaboration (regardless of locale)

- More unified faculty because people are working/cooperating together;
- Equity and inclusion through collaboration; Inclusion of more than one perspective, opinion, differences; More voices are heard; More diverse perspectives.
- Potential to lighten a heavy workload by spreading it over multiple people;
- Collaboration [and engagement in relevant professional activities in general] are good ways to get to know what’s going on in your department, your discipline, etc.

- Improved quality through **peer review**
- Create a support **community** around faculty
- Could be local, regional, national, face-to-face, virtual . .

General benefits of collaboration within discipline-specific networks or communities

- "Disciplines have a culture and shared history" and specific [idiosyncratic?] ways of looking at things. Biases toward (or against) doing certain things. For example, Mathematicians' reticence to embrace technology and/or pedagogical change.
- Disciplines may have different ways of saving, storing, and publishing information.
- Potential to overcome [academic] **isolation** some faculty feel, even when situated in a large department [where their perspective or research area is not prevalent];
- Potentially easier to have work valued for Tenure & Promotion when others (in the same discipline or in a system) are aware of the level of work invested into a project
- Adherence in disciplines to national standards and accreditation considerations
- Professional development, especially support of new teaching faculty
- Encouragement of multi-disciplinary collaboration among related disciplines
- Combine / increase funding opportunities
- Build community to discuss teaching in this discipline
- Networks to stay up to date on latest research in the field, research on teaching in the field
- With **peer review** comes reduction in errors
- Opportunities for faculty/subject-matter-experts to share best practices with other groups
- Ability to increase dialog within discipline
- Increased mentorship [formal, informal]
- Ability to identify what technolog[ies] work well within specific disciplines (i.e. music and iPads)
- Collaboration across systems may lead to system-wide adoption of common books
- Sharing of graduate students (across systems) may help students to develop teaching skills
- Pull experts together
- Help with time management

Additional benefits of **inter**disciplinary-cooperation

- Fewer "silos" on campus; Less "us vs. them" and more "we."

General benefits of collaboration on "open" topics within discipline-specific networks or communities

- When engaging in traditional "disciplinary networks," there are good possibilities for longer-term and wider ranging collaboration including OER, open pedagogy, and other linked practices
- Reduction in redundancy/duplication of efforts. Saving time. **Potentially reduced duplication of efforts**. For example, in development of **ancillaries** in Economics.
- [More OER means] more subjects available for students

- [More OER means] more diverse options in classroom [and] less forcibly tied to one subject
- Ability to meet unique needs of particular class types (i.e.. Biology labs, etc.)
- Ability to achieve continuity of textbooks from semester to semester even when different publishing platforms are used
- Connecting and addressing OER gaps
- Ability to increase the availability of resources / create a larger “pot” of resources
- Ability to develop new/better resources
- Ability to leverage/negotiate with administrators for support
- Knowing what is “in progress” to avoid duplication
- Spread open resources to a broader audience (i.e. international)
- Development of new **ancillaries** through cooperation and communication
- Division of labor would lead to more progress on more projects
- May contribute (positively) to addressing “solo author” faculty burnout
- Possibilities for faculty to address other faculty who are resistant to OER
- Can help to connect academic and practice [practitioner] worlds
- Commitment to social justice
- Cost argument is really easy to make
- Need to do this because of encroachment of OPMs in graduate education
- Getting 2-year college faculty in technical fields interested in collaborative OER work
- Give 2-year faculty more opportunities for creating their own work
- Address the issue of varying degrees of comfort towards OER
- Address lack of time to find / develop OER
- Provides economies of scale
- Able to share with whomever you want
- Where limited numbers of open sources exist (for example, in physical sciences or with math exercises) opportunities exist to organize and evaluate resources
- Collective evaluation of open resources
- Share professional development resources
- Leverage the group to help create more information about unexplored areas within a discipline
- Validation [of resources?]
- [Use as a way to] get help for time-consuming processes
- Resources made this way are more engaging for students because of the different pedagogical strategies each faculty will bring

Benefits of collaboration (by faculty) for students

- Uniformity for transfer / Potentially better transferability of course credit for students earning credit at one institution and transferring it to other institutions. (When course materials are collaboratively-created or somehow “approved” OER.)
- More open materials created and available mean there are even more courses which could use OER

Barriers

- Collaborators (not to mention collaborators interested in openness) are difficult to find where disciplines are new/emerging, or very specific to a particular location [or industry].
- Collaboration takes time.
- As faculty we assign group work to students, but we don't always do group work (or want to do group work well) ourselves.
- Unknown levels of support from existing professional associations
- Each faculty member is in a different stage of connection to OER
- How to do project management across 10 different campuses?
- Determine approaches to support 15+ faculty (money, experts, etc.)
- Lack of clarity regarding best platform(s) and methods to foster collaboration
- Lack of engagement and disciplinary knowledge about intellectual property
- Unclear how/whether this benefits promotion and tenure
- [Current practice] relies on adjuncts and overworked professors.
- [Current practice] relies on publisher-created resources
- Need to address problem of lack of ancillaries
- Need to address inconsistencies in platform (technology)
- Need to address lack of training
- Need to address who manages the group
- Ego!
- Time constraints
- Silos are easy
- Faculty don't always work together across disciplines

Other observations / opportunities

- Some institutions have incentives for subject matter experts to collaborate within their department, outside of their department, with the Information Technology department, etc.
- There is a problem in identifying "open" materials sold to us within paid packages
- Colleagues *should be* aware of what their peers are doing
- Opportunity: Create a best practices for large OER cross-campus project
- Problem: Our accrediting body is a for-profit publisher with a history of IP theft

QUESTIONS

- What are the risks/rewards of creating an OER/OpenEd group within an existing scholarly society?
- Who manages, curates, maintains, etc. community information and infrastructure? This requires personnel, which cost money.
- What kind of platform (e.g. software to store documents, information) is best for my discipline?
- How can OER meet the unique needs of lab classes (for example, biology)