

Vice Chancellor's Strategic Fund Student OER adaptation project, University of Cape Town

(May 2013-April 2014)

Institution & Institutional Context

UCT's OER Project launched the UCT OpenContent directory in February 2010, developed through the generous funding of the Shuttleworth Foundation in 2009/2010 to make a selection of UCT's teaching and learning materials available as Open Education Resources. In launching the UCT OpenContent directory, UCT joined a global movement of openness and knowledge sharing, following the lead of renowned institutions such as MIT, the Open University, Yale University, the University of Michigan and many others.

Despite displaying a commitment to Open Education through signing of the Cape Town Declaration and the Berlin Open Access Declaration, and the affordance provided by the UCT OpenContent directory, UCT has no institutional mandate on OER production for its staff, although the Intellectual Property policy does allow for it (and explicitly mentions Creative Commons licenses). The slow growth of the UCT OpenContent directory and the low participation by UCT scholars in producing and using OER was the primary motivation for piloting a student-focused approach to enhancing the open agenda at UCT.

Keywords and OEP themes

University of Cape Town, OER, post-graduate students, African content, adaptation

Themes: Institutional Strategy: Access to content expertise ; Student Co-creation: Student Voice

What is the case Study about?

The purpose of this project was to pilot a student-focused OER adaptation project, utilising student experiences of quality teaching and their familiarity with lecturers and their teaching materials to help drive a grassroots or bottom-up approach to OER creation. Six faculty-based students and one student coordinator were employed in order to promote OER in general and the UCT OpenContent directory in particular, to actively solicit existing teaching materials and adapt them into OER through copyright clearance and minor structural

and pedagogical changes, and to upload the completed OER to UCT OpenContent and make them available under Creative Commons licenses.

The aim of this project was to expand UCT's OpenContent initiative to the point where it reached a critical mass. To do so the staff in the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching needed to solicit further contributions to the UCT OpenContent directory, support academics in publishing materials under open licenses, promote awareness of the benefits of open content, and continue to add features to the UCT OpenContent website in order to increase visibility and accessibility of materials internationally.

The UCT OpenContent directory was at a crucial stage of development where CILT was endeavouring to support early adopters to publish good examples of their teaching and learning materials online. This was an important phase to demonstrate the value of the directory to UCT academics, students and senior leadership and to encourage the publishing of teaching and learning content in open formats so that it is seen as a valued and routine part of academic practice.

What is the issue or need you are addressing?

The Vice Chancellor's project aimed to support and nurture Open Educational Practice at UCT by increasing the number of academics involved in OER production, and secondarily to develop a student society that would be proactive in encouraging academics to share OER and students to use it. The primary needs identified were the

lack of awareness around Open Education by staff; the low incentives and high costs for producing OER; and the slow growth of the institutional repository and the OER community at UCT.

This project focused on increasing the number of OER present in the institutional directory, and did not have a specific pedagogical model.

How was the initiative implemented?

Six student facilitators and one coordinator were hired and tasked with seeking out high-quality teaching materials, approaching the producing lecturers, and asking them to contribute their materials to be adapted. They were trained in intellectual property and copyright, creative commons licensing, and introduced to some of the factors involved in online pedagogy.

Once teaching materials were sourced from lecturers, they underwent an adaptation process consisting of a copyright clearance process alongside some minor pedagogical and format changes to adapt the materials for an online audience. This process was conducted primarily by the students themselves to reduce the time burden on the contributing lecturers and thus incentivise them to share more materials.

Outcomes

Although hampered by timing problems, the project did succeed in its goal of increasing the number of OER in the repository, including an entire course and a set of skills development lectures from the Politics department, the Physics department agreeing to make the entirety

of the content currently shared on the Physics departmental website accessible through UCT OpenContent, and the recent upload of Professor Les Underhill's Statistics textbook IntroStat, which has been requested for use by the Imperial College in London as a prescribed reading in their Applied Performance Modelling course.

This project did not have the capacity to study learning outcomes.

Issues & challenges

Some lecturers were unwilling to share their materials, citing potential problems with their publication efforts (usually in closed-access journals) and concerns over copyright. Another lecturer, while initially enthusiastic, withdrew their video OER by the end of the project citing concerns over the sensitivity of the material in question. Due to the decentralised nature of the project, and the interference caused by student vacations, not as many materials were adapted as could have been if the project had been more stable.

Using students as the OER adaptors also sometimes resulted in scheduling conflicts during exam periods or other times when they experienced heightened academic workloads. Feedback from the students post-project indicates that a more structured, workshop-type approach would have helped prioritise the VC's project activity and possibly result in more adaptation work having been completed.

The student coordinator was involved in mediating difficult questions around copyright and to allay some of the more common fears. As a one-year pilot project, there was no chance to revise project activity to account for student workload issues.

The development of an institutional mandate requiring staff to share their materials as OER would have made the solicitation process considerably easier, although the project did not have the capacity to accommodate the entirety of UCT if such a mandate did exist.

National prioritisation of the open agenda, accompanied by policies or incentives supporting academics in their sharing practice, would have supported the project by giving academics more incentives to engage in Open Education.

Insights and Recommendations for National and/or Institutional Development

Students can provide valuable support to academics beginning to engage in Open Education by providing extra capacity (in the form of copyright clearance assistance).

In a situation where academics are not mandated to produce OER, incentives can help convince those not yet involved in Open Education to begin engaging with it.

Contact person and details

Project Coordinator:

Glenda Cox – Glenda.cox@uct.ac.za

Student Coordinator:

Thomas King – Thomas.king@uct.ac.za

