

# Developing courses for OERu – a CSU perspective

## Institution & Institutional Context

**Charles Sturt University (CSU) is Australia's leading provider of distance education and one of the first Australian universities to introduce distance education study. Both our distance education and on campus students receive the same globally-recognised, quality education.**

Charles Sturt University is committed to achieving excellence in education and to maintaining national leadership in flexible and distance education by:

- providing accessible and effective online and mobile-friendly learning environments for all students, regardless of location or mode of study
- promoting, recognising and supporting good practice in learning and teaching
- providing an extensive range of student support services and
- strengthening learning and teaching partnerships with the professions and industry.

Our campuses are located across rural, metropolitan and international locations. Our Australian campuses serve the distinct needs of diverse regional communities from northern New South Wales to central Victoria. Our metropolitan locations at the CSU Study Centres in Melbourne and Sydney provide on campus education to international students in a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs from the Faculty of Business. Internationally, we also deliver programs in collaboration with leading partner institutions in Europe and Asia, as well as through distance education.

In 2013 our total students numbers were 39,315 with 24,194 of these studying via distance education.

## Keywords and OEP themes

Keywords – OERu; open education; Open education resources (OER); and open education practices (OEP). Key themes - Teacher voice; access to new markets; and access to content expertise.

## What is the case study about?

This case study describes the process undertaken in designing courses for OER universitas (OERu). CSU joined the OERu in 2014 as a partner institution. The aim is to adapt existing CSU courses to suit the OERu model and use existing OER resources. One course chosen to develop for delivery in 2015 is the Introduction to Indigenous Australia: Culture, history & contemporary issues. The other course is yet to be decided.

## What is the issue or need you are addressing?

As a partner institution of OERu, CSU is required to provide a minimum of two course offerings. Our membership of OERu, an international philanthropic organisation, provides affordable pathways for students worldwide who might not otherwise be able to access a university education. This widens access to higher education as a community service and offers the possibility of new markets for the University. The initiative also provides collaborative and networking opportunities when working with like-minded academic institutions at an international level.

## How was the initiative implemented?

Courses for the OERu are being developed from existing CSU courses, adapting them to suit the model of delivery used by OERu. The process has involved working with CSU academics who have designed and currently teach the courses at CSU. By working collaboratively with these academics, we have been able to adapt the courses to make them suitable for delivery to OERu students. The Indigenous course will be offered as a full course in module format. This will provide the opportunity for other OERu partners to reuse and remix the existing content to form comparative courses in Indigenous studies appropriate to their country of origin. The outline of each course is added to the OERu wiki open planning pages for OERu partners to review and provide feedback on as critical friends. Once the courses are offered to students, course evaluations will capture the student voice about the design and delivery of the subject.

The screenshot shows a course page with a dark red header containing the title "The Dreaming and relationships to country" and a dropdown arrow. Below the header is a navigation menu with five items: "1. Topic 1 Overview", "2. The Dreaming", "3. Relationships to Country", "4. Dreaming Stories" (highlighted in orange), and "5. References". The main content area features the title "Dreaming Stories" and a "Key Idea" section with an orange background and a circular icon. The text in the "Key Idea" section reads: "Dreaming stories contain knowledge as well as a guide to living." Below this is a paragraph of text: "The most common interaction most Australians have with The Dreaming is by reading Dreaming stories. The word 'stories' in English can convey 'made up' and 'fictional'; something that does not carry the weight of 'fact' or 'truth'. This is not the way to think of Dreaming Stories. Indigenous culture turns on knowledge, and access to knowledge is carefully controlled. A person needs to show they are capable and responsible before they can be taught the next level of knowledge. Often this progression is publicly acknowledged through initiation ceremonies. The older you were the more you learnt that was relevant to your survival." To the right of the text is a small image of a landscape with a caption: "This image was taken in Ngjyeemaa country and permission for their use has been given to Charles Sturt".

## Outcomes

At face value, the outcome of this project was the design and delivery of 2 courses for the OERu. However, working to design courses for the open has also resulted in a number of outcomes that was not considered from the outset. These outcomes include;

- Developing an understanding of what 'open' means including the concepts of Open Education Practices (OEP) and Open Education Resources (OER) by staff adapting existing courses for the OERu;
- Recognising that students, teachers and Institutions need to undergo a 'culture shift' to include 'open' as part of their practice;
- The opportunity to develop courses in the 'open' and collaborate with peers from partner institutions;
- Examination of a number of University policies to incorporate openness and OERs as well as addressing a number of operational matters including what courses to offer, how to manage student enrolment outside the normal fee-paying enrolment system, as well as workload implications.

## Issues & challenges

Some of the issues and challenges encountered were both at Institutional and Faculty level as well as at a course design level. At a Faculty and Institutional level, the following discussions needed to occur at a senior level;

- Gaining the support of Faculty and school staff such as Deans and Head of Schools to support offerings of current courses in an open and free environment;
- Willingness, availability and consideration of work load of academic teaching staff to adapt current courses to suit the OERu model;
- The extent to which to offer content in the open. Should it be just a subject or a whole course? The pros and cons of putting the whole course into the open rather than just a subject as a teaser/ taster or introduction to studying at university;
- Defining which course would best suit the OERu mass undergraduate market and

which course best fits with other OERu offerings. If there were overlaps in offerings between institutions then cooperation between institutions was required;

- Discussions related to how to run courses and offer free places in a course so that fee-paying and free students collaborate together on one module;
- Review of recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy which currently allows the award of 60% of subjects from elsewhere or higher towards a CSU degree.

At a course design level the following issues were encountered;

- For the Indigenous course, sensitivity and consideration of Indigenous knowledge and content being offered in an open course needed to be addressed. Discussions occurred with senior staff within the School and Faculty to ensure that staff were comfortable about how the course would be delivered as an OERu course. These issues were addressed by excluding peer discussion forums in the design of the learning activities. Instead of peer to peer interaction, students will work through the content, blog personal reflections and submit assessments as required;
- A whole range of skills and competencies including technical and pedagogical knowledge is required to move a course from a closed institutional LMS to an open platform. Both technical and learning design support is needed to assist academics to modify courses to suit the OERu model of delivery;
- Time is also a significant issue particularly when re-purposing existing materials for open delivery;
- The use of content in ebooks, readings in closed journal databases and textbooks also had a significant impact on being able to re-use existing course content for open courses. Often this resulted in readings not being used and alternative readings being sourced from open areas after much searching. In some cases no reading material was provided due to the closed nature of journal databases and libraries.

## Insights and Recommendations for National and/or Institutional Development

Institutional strategies need to include 'open' and 'open educational practices' as every day practice for learning and teaching. Discussions need to occur within the University at all levels that encourage a shift in culture to open practices. Different models of openness could be considered. So answering the question: 'What does open mean for our institution?' The answer to this question for each institution will then open up other areas to consider including degrees of openness, understanding the value and benefit of OERs, linking OER & OEP with institutional strategies and policies including staff roles and workload, managing open resources, and intellectual policy. Staff development and support for those developing and using OERs needs to include skills and competencies in creating, reusing and sharing OERs, quality issues around reuse of material, technical support and guidance as well as time allocation to develop skills and content. Ownership of copyright, intellectual property and licensing of material at both an Institution and National level also requires investigation. Recognition of prior learning also needs to be addressed.

---

### Contact person and details

Linda Ward, Learning Designer Manager,  
Charles Sturt University, lward@csu.edu.au

