

# Open course design and development – lessons learned

## Institution & Institutional Context

Thompson Rivers University is a mid-size university in the interior of British Columbia, Canada that grants undergraduate and masters level degrees. TRU has advanced prior learning assessment and recognition policies and processes. The TRU Open Learning Division provides open and distance courses, programs and degrees to approximately 12,000 learners.

## Keywords and OEP themes

OERu; open course design and development; TRU; Thompson Rivers University; Open learning; OER.

## What is the case study about?

The case study focuses on the redevelopment of a fully OER-based course for use in the OERu. The course was developed collaboratively by developers in multiple countries working in the WikiEducator wiki as our first contribution to the OERu course portfolio.

## Why is the initiative being introduced?

The initiative is part of the institutional commitment to the OERu to provide two open courses to the OERu portfolio. The specific issue under study is the use of open processes as the model for course design and development in the OERu project. The learning and teaching strategy is to permit students to approach and use the course materials in different ways: self study for personal interest; use in small group study; completion for assessment of learning and potential credit by my institution; adoption and/or adaptation by other institutions under the CC-BY-SA licensing provisions of the content.

Purposes: remove barriers from access to learning; being able to share and reuse educational content freely; move towards open and collaborative processes in course development. The project timeline was approximately 18 months and is now complete.

## How was the initiative implemented?

The implementation was undertaken primarily by four persons from my institution including a faculty member, instructional designer, editor and myself. Additional work was undertaken by five international volunteers who performed additional work and reviews on the course as it was under development in the wiki. The processes included identifying an appropriate course for reuse, development of a prototype in the wiki, building course blueprints and outlines, preparing and converting OER content, and opening the course for peer review.

The project was peer reviewed both by open invitation in the wiki, and by internal faculty with a specialty in teaching and practice in the subject area: Art appreciation and techniques.

## Outcomes

- The outcomes were the successful completion of the course in the OERu and a model for further development and research.
- While the course was open to input by anyone, students were not involved during the development of this course.
- A higher level of awareness and engagement was observed in my institution, as well as ongoing discussions about how to incorporate OERu content into existing university programming, and vice versa.

## Issues & challenges

A number of challenges were encountered. For example, the need to develop a course

that could be evaluated for credit within a traditional academic setting placed constraints on the types of activities, collaborations and other aspects of the course that could potentially have created a more open-ended learning experience for students. It was found that developers spent too much time on technical issues (format conversions and wiki markup) compared with design work. OER that were used in the redevelopment of the course had some copyright problems requiring redevelopment of original material that would meet the OERu's CC licensing requirements.

Developers found compromises and generated multiple ways in which students could complete the course if they were not undertaking it for credit. Some developers gained more expertise in document conversion and wiki markup and also some assistance was acquired from internal technical course production resources. It was determined that future development would be undertaken with more technical support. Developers recruited volunteers to develop new content that did not meet OERu copyright requirements, and placed it in the WikiMedia Commons for sharing under an appropriate licence.

In our case the policy would be at the province not national level (Canada). Policies and incentives could be introduced to encourage more use of OER in funded course development. More use of prior learning assessments could be encouraged. Funding for open textbooks could dramatically increase awareness of OER and open processes (as in the BC Open Textbook Initiative).

## Insights & recommendations for institutional & national development

The importance of focusing on developing a developer community cannot be understated. Research into open source software development indicates that such elements as developer motivations, maintenance of a community in the face of potential attrition, carefully considered division of labor to ensure developers are working from their strengths, mentoring, and explicitly shared communication tools and processes are essential to the successful completion of open course design and development. Also important are the maintenance of development histories and design/change rationales where they are easily accessible for new as well as continuing developers.

Open educational resources and processes are not necessarily best off by being mandated in a top down manner. Rather, funded small projects with support and a supportive department or faculty, along with willingness to permit such work to be done as part of regular workload, not as a special outside of side of desk process will be helpful. These can then be used to educate, disseminate and promote organizational learning around OER and open processes. Organizationally, more flexible allowances for non traditional provision of credit via prior learning assessments is very critical to the success of such initiatives. OER initiatives can become catalysts for institutional transformation.

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