Stewarding Open Educational Practices: An Interview with Francesca Allegri and Bradley Hemminger

The term, open educational resources (OER), was coined in 2002 during a forum held by UNESCO as *the open provision of educational resources, enabled by information and communication technologies, for consultation, use and adaptation by a community of users for non-commercial purposes.* Since then, the idea of educational material, freely and openly accessible on the Web, has attracted substantial attention.

In the past five years, the OER movement shifted its focus from creation to reuse and the adoption of sustainable open educational practices. Between 2010 and 2011, the Open Educational Quality Initiative collected 60 case studies of successful OER projects in Europe. In 2014, the "Open Resources: Influence on Learners and Educators" (ORIOLE) project concluded with the book publication 'Reusing Open Resources', from which selected chapters are available as a special issue of the Journal of Interactive Media in Education. The organization 'Lumen Learning' recently released an interactive dashboard to communicate and share information about the effect of open educational resource (re)use.

The 2015 Horizon report identifies the proliferation of Open Educational Resources (OER) as one of six trends that will accelerate technology adoption in higher education. As OER is gaining traction across campuses, the report predicts an increased acceptance and usage over the next 2-3 years. However, the broader proliferation of OER hinges on effective leadership: "*While data shows that some faculty are integrating OER on their own, institutional leadership can reinforce the use of open content*". As Tony Bates observed: "*There is a lot of evidence to suggest that the take-up of OERs by instructors is still minimal, other than by those who created the original version".*

How can institutional leadership foster the use of OER? Which strategies do stewards of open education deploy to disseminate best practices and high-quality material? It was my pleasure to talk to Francesca Allegri and Bradley Hemminger, who are currently implementing an OER initiative at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

What is your role at UNC Chapel Hill?
Brad: I'm a faculty member in the School of Information and Library Science. One of my major research areas is "Shared Open Scholarship", and as part of this I'm interested in the role OERs can play in making education more accessible, and I am

committed to promoting the reuse of high quality teaching materials. I chair our UNC OER committee, which several of us started in 2012. We are interested in having better support for OERs on the UNC campus. Related to this work, I've previously chaired the Electronic Theses and Dissertations committee on campus (which shifted us from print to free electronic dissemination of these materials), and chair of the UNC Scholarly Communications Committee.

Fran: I am an Assistant Director (Interim) and Head of User Services at the Health Sciences Library at the University of North Carolina. I became involved in the OER initiative on campus at the invitation of Brad to help plan how the university could be successful in engaging faculty and other instructors in creating and using OER. Our library has been an early and strong proponent of open access to scholarly output and of public access to the published products of federally funded research. The OER initiative seemed to be a very logical extension of those initiatives as well as being tied to our global initiatives to improve access to health information.

What is the scope and goal of your OER initiative?
Plan: Provide a well-developed program of support on campus for faculty who choose to make course improvements, including the use or development of Open Educational Resources as course materials. This program will use expertise in the Libraries, the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) and other units on campus.

Goals: To develop a program at UNC-CH to support the use and development of OERs here. The program would have four primary goals:

- Improve courses and learning outcomes at UNC
- Significantly reduce the cost of educational materials for students taking courses at UNC
- Produce open shared course materials that can be utilized by other institutions
- Become a visible leader in developing open educational resources, both at the state and national levels

What have you achieved so far, and what are next steps?
The first step was identifying important participants on campus who were interested in or might want to be involved with OERs, or would be affected by the adoption of OERs on campus, and engaging them in our discussions. Some of the groups we identified are the Center for Faculty Excellence, the University Libraries, UNC Press, the textbook division of Student Stores, ITS/Sakai (course software), Innovate@Carolina, General Administration, and Faculty Council. As a group, we drafted an initial planning document to guide our work.   The next step was surveying similar efforts at other institutions, and identifying what made them successful or not. A library science masters student conducted web site reviews and compiled a comparative spreadsheet and librarians created an online survey which was sent to faculty development, scholarly communications, and health sciences library directors' listservs. From these conversations and data we evaluated

whether there should be a program at UNC supporting OERs, what form it should take, and what challenges we should expect to address.   One thing we identified from our survey was that successful programs included the library and the faculty development center as critical partners. Our committee felt that, for a number of reasons, the best approach on our campus was a slow growth one, where we could build support on campus from campus units and faculty, have guidelines available (implemented here as a library resource guide http://guides.lib.unc.edu/OER), be sure the infrastructure was in place (for instance having an OER collection in the Carolina Digital Repository with an easy submission mechanism), and develop metrics for measuring success before we begin to promote OERs on campus.

We will begin to officially promote OER support on campus later this year (Fall 2015), including an award program that will annually help a small number of instructors re-examine their courses to incorporate more OERs, or to develop publicly sharable OER content for their courses.   The award program will provide stipends to help offset the costs involved with re-envisioning courses and developing open course content materials.   The UNC Press is connected to this effort by looking at ways to support authors of larger content pieces (like full textbooks).

Do you have a vision of how open educational practices will impact the UNC campus over the next 2-3 years?
In our discussions, one thing we emphasize is that this is a win/win proposition. With OERs you do not need to convert everyone to using OERs, nor should you (it is not necessarily appropriate for all course materials).   So, it is easy to grow at whatever pace best suits your environment.   We believe the uptake will be small in the first few years (a few dozen courses).   Early adopters are already doing this; so we are focused on educating instructors who may not be familiar with the OER concept, and what materials may already be available to them. We think, though, at some point in the future, this will snowball into much larger numbers; however this will most likely happen 5-10 years out..

When you look at your own personal learning environment, what part do open educational resources play?
Brad: Because of my research interests in open, shared scholarly discourse, I already follow OER practices.   I produce most all of my course materials, and in some cases reuse freely available materials (slides from instructors of similar materials at other institutions, videos that do a good job of conveying important course topics).   I make all of my materials available online, and free to other instructors to use (licensed through Creative Commons).   The one exception that I haven't managed to avoid (yet!) is the Database course I teach where our curriculum uses the same textbook for several courses in sequence.   Excluding that, students (or anyone) can freely access, save, and share my course materials at no cost.

Fran: Librarians are implanted with a sharing chip! All of the instructional materials we create here at the Library are freely available. When we receive requests to use

or adapt content we have developed, we only ask for attribution. Unless there is some requirement from an external collaborator to do otherwise, that is how we approach our teaching materials. For me personally, I love to find OER content that I or my colleagues can use or adapt. Much better than recreating the wheel.

One role librarians will play in the UNC-CH OER initiative will be helping faculty find relevant, quality OER's they can consider using in their teaching . This is a key way that the subject specialist librarians across the libraries can help faculty adopt use of this content. This may also inspire faculty to create or share curriculum materials they develop if librarians identify there is a lack of suitable content in their area of teaching. The librarians can also support faculty sharing efforts, for example, alerting them to the Carolina Digital Repository and submission process, assisting with Creative Commons licensing, and similar help that can preserve faculty's desired author's rights and make their contributions discoverable by their peers and students. Contacting a librarian early in the process could save the faculty member's time, also.

Can you name some of the barriers and enablers for open educational practices that you have encountered in your work at UNC?
There are a number of **barriers**. Some of the main ones we have identified include
- Educating instructors about what OERs are
- Finding and developing quality materials
- Intellectual property and copyright concerns
- Financial income concerns
- Technological and sustainability questions

To be successful, an initiative of this type needs to anticipate and respond to concerns and challenges such as these. Based on our committee's research, however, we believe an OER program at UNC has the potential for a huge upside, in terms of impact and publicity. There is little downside, as appropriate infrastructure exists on campus to support OERs. Even if only a small fraction of courses at UNC adopt OERs, this still results in a significant benefit. This program has the potential to greatly impact every North Carolina student's cost of education and this is a critical time to help students with education costs.

Enabling factors include
- Availability of a large and rapidly growing pool of OERs to use in creating course materials
- High prices of traditional textbooks causing demand for more affordable educational materials
- Instructors' desire to provide high quality low cost course materials to students
- Regular discussions of open access issues at faculty meetings and annual program by a campus scholarly communications committee.

From your experience, are students generally aware of or rather oblivious to the open learning opportunities that surround them?

Up until recently, I think students were less aware of Open Learning as a concept, and the practicality of OERs. During the last few years, and even more so in the near future, I think four factors are causing this to change:

- Increasingly high prices of college textbooks
- Familiarity with Open concepts (open source software, freely available music/videos, Creative Commons)
- Environments (YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat, Pinterest) encouraging sharing and reuse
- Tools (cellphones, cameras, video editing software, presentation software) that facilitate easily producing and sharing freely available content

If you could give one single piece of advice to every faculty member and instructor, what would it be?

Please contact your library liaison (http://library.unc.edu/ask/) to learn more about OERs and what OER materials and support are available to you, and consult the UNC-CH campus page on OERs (http://guides.lib.unc.edu/OER) for more information.

Please each provide a picture and short bio.

Brad Hemminger is an associate professor at the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at the University of North Carolina. He has a joint appointment in Carolina Center for Genome Sciences. He has a number of areas of research interests including digital scholarship, information seeking, information visualization, user interface design, digital libraries and biomedical health informatics. He has published over 85 papers, served on several international standards committees, and consulted for a number of companies in the areas of visualization and user interfaces. He serves as a reviewer for over a fifteen journals and conferences. He currently teaches scholarly communications, databases, biomedical health informatics, information visualization, and data science. He is director the Informatics and Visualization Lab at UNC, part of the Interactive Information Systems Lab, and directs the Center for Research and Development of Digital Libraries. His current research interests are focused on developing new paradigms for scholarship, publishing, information seeking and use by academics in this digital age. For more information see his website http://ils.unc.edu/bmh/.

Francesca Allegri, MSLS, is Assistant Director (Interim) of the Health Sciences Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. As Assistant Director, she is determining and implementing user focused strategic initiatives, allocating resources, and advising the Director in these areas. She also is Head of User Services, Health Sciences Library. She manages a strong liaison librarian program and single service point (20 FTEs) and is part of the library's senior management team. She is also a graduate of the National Library of Medicine/Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries Leadership Fellows Program. Prior to that, she held two positions in the Health Sciences Library's administrative unit managing professional librarian recruitment, staff development, planning, and institutional data collection and reporting. She also served four years as Department Head of the education department at the Health Sciences Library and has had leadership experience in campus organizations, such as the University Managers Association and the UNC Network for Clinical Research Professionals. Earlier, Ms. Allegri served as Assistant Head at the University of Illinois Library of the Health Sciences in Urbana, Illinois. She holds an MSLS from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Illinois.