

## **Episode 4: Educational Equity and the Role of OERs**

### **Omar Brown**

Welcome to Libraries Out Loud, a podcast produced by the University at Buffalo Libraries. I'm your host, Omar Brown, Evening Supervisor and Silverman Library on the UB's North campus. In each episode of the Libraries Out Loud, we'll explore the connections between UB's Libraries and the research, learning, teaching and creative activities of our faculty, students, and staff. In our fourth episode, Chris Hollister, Head of Scholarly Communication and Joe Patton, Assistant Librarian are joining us for a conversation about the Library's open and affordable learning initiatives. Hello, Chris and Joe.

### **Chris Hollister**

Good to be with you, Omar. Thanks.

### **Joe Patton**

Happy to be here.

### **Omar Brown**

To get started. Tell us a little bit more about yourself and the work that you do for the Libraries. Chris let's start with you.

### **Chris Hollister**

Sure. Omar, thanks. I serve as Head of Scholarly Communication. In short, that means I'm responsible for increasing the visibility and the impact of the research and scholarship produced at UB. By extension, I'm also responsible for the Library's Open and Affordable Learning Initiative, which takes place by way of our recently developed OER studio. OER standing for Open Educational Resources. I should say that issues of social justice drive much of the work we do, which aligns with my own values and with the Mission of the Libraries more generally and the nature of this work is both local and international. And accordingly, it sometimes requires international travel, which is also a personal interest. So, the work is both personally and professionally rewarding in a variety of ways.

### **Omar Brown**

Wow. Joe?

**Joe Patton**

Yeah, I work with Chris on the Scholarly Communications team specifically focused on aspects of Open Education and OER advocacy. I work intimately with a lot of the aspects of the OER studio that Chris mentioned, as well as coordinate with our partners and colleagues at SUNY OER Services. My personal interests are all over the map, but I'm particularly fond of Military and Maritime History, as well as being a big film buff.

**Omar Brown**

Do you film stuff or basically like watch films?

**Joe Patton**

I study film pretty intimately. Yeah, yeah, I did a minor in Film Studies in my undergraduate institution, actually. Yeah.

**Omar Brown**

All right, cool. Chris, you mentioned your interest in international travel. How has that had an impact on your work in the area of open and affordable education?

**Chris Hollister**

Sure. Yeah. Many years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Singapore to observe and report on library operations at UB's Partnership Program with the Singapore Institute of Management. While there, I learned the shocking extent to which commercial publishers exploit the international education textbook Market Place. Of course, it happens here in the states as well, but I was flabbergasted to discover, for example, the fifth edition of an introductory psychology text priced over 400 Singaporean dollars at their campus bookstore. That equates to roughly 300 U.S. dollars. So that experience in particular inspired the work that we do in the Libraries to mitigate the unsustainably and inexcusably high costs of textbooks for UB students here and abroad, and that work ultimately informs the development of our OER studio.

**Omar Brown**

Since you went to Singapore, did you like this partnership?

**Chris Hollister**

Mm-Hmm.

**Omar Brown**

Has anybody from Singapore actually come over to America to see how things operate at UB?

**Chris Hollister**

Yes. Yes. Once a year the program administrators travel back here to UB for a variety of things, and I always meet with them when they're here.

**Omar Brown**

Oh, that's great.

**Chris Hollister**

Mm-Hmm.

**Omar Brown**

Joe, how did you come to be involved in the open and affordable education?

**Joe Patton**

Yeah, I'm fortunate to have been involved with the UB Libraries in many ways since I was a student here earning my master's degree, actually. When Chris was looking for another team member to work with him on Open Education, he reached out to me and I started investigating it a little more deeply. I think it's been a really good fit for me because of the possibilities that Open Education presents. And I also see it as a really just and righteous cause that's worth our efforts to pursue.

**Omar Brown**

Now this is a two-part question. What are open educational resources and why are they important to UB faculty and students?

**Chris Hollister**

OER's are any teaching, learning or research materials in any format that reside in the public domain or are made available under an intellectual property, license permitting free use or repurposing in educational settings. So, examples of this include complete courses, parts of courses, modules, video recordings, course sites, and in most instances, textbooks. And the "open" part of OER's is really the key. That openness is characterized by what we refer to as

the five rights or the five R's that instructors have when using only OER's to teach their courses. These are the rights to Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix and Redistribute course content as they deem necessary to best facilitate the learning process for their students.

**Joe Patton**

And the benefits of OER can be seen from the perspective of both students and instructors. For instructors, they have control over the materials they use and how they use them. Students benefit by saving what are often exorbitantly priced textbooks. We hosted an OER webinar series this past fall, and one of the featured guest speakers was an instructor from Monroe Community College named Dr Tori Matthews. Tori had a lot to say about the benefits OER for his own work, but he was really compelling when he spoke about some of his students and how lifting the burden of material costs off their shoulders really made a difference in their lives.

**Omar Brown**

SUNY colleges and universities have major workloads by making their materials accessible. Has OER been plagued within those particular accessibility issues?

**Chris Hollister**

Yeah, yeah. Accessibility is, I think, probably one of the top two or three issues related to Open Educational Resources. So it's, you know, I think it's kind of sexy to say that we're....we're making things openly available for people. But the reality is that a lot of these materials were not created in a way that's accessible to everyone. So, a lot of retroactive work is taking place right now to try to address that problem.

**Omar Brown**

Joe, you have anything to add on to that?

**Joe Patton**

Yes. So I would...I would say that accessibility has become kind of a primary focus among the open education community. The available resources and repositories make accessibility a standard by which most of the things that they host on their sites have to follow and at every open ed conference I've ever been to accessibility is featured quite prominently, so accessibility is a mainstay for us at this point.

**Omar Brown**

Chris, you mentioned the library's OER studio. Please tell us more.

**Chris Hollister**

Sure, happy too. The OER Studio is a grant funded initiative developed by the Libraries to engage, educate, and train university faculty and instructors in adopting, adapting or creating open content for their teaching. Studio Librarians are available to consult with faculty and instructors about incorporating OER's into their teaching, to advance relevant developments in OER use and more generally to promote the benefits of open education moving forward. And I should say that the studio also specializes in facilitating the production of OER related research.

**Omar Brown**

Joe?

**Joe Patton**

Yeah, I actually came onto the team because of OER studio initiative that Chris began, so I'm a big fan. We've been lucky so far and that the studio is able to function as a go to resource for faculty and instructors who are interested in pursuing OER classroom use. We're hoping we can continue that based upon the success we've had so far. There was a particular meeting we had a faculty member last year who told us that they were able to find the right OER for their course because of some of the infrastructure we had put in place. And that was really rewarding to hear.

**Omar Brown**

Is UB the only university in the Western New York area who has a OER studio.

Or are there other schools that also has an OER studio. I know this is grant funded.

**Chris Hollister**

Yeah. So, I think it's fair to say it's set have a good number of academic libraries, have some form of open educational support. I don't know that any of them have an OER studio per se, but this is this is increasingly becoming a part of what academic libraries do.

**Omar Brown**

Can you tell us more about the OER studio's activities, accomplishments, and future goals?

**Joe Patton**

So, we've concentrated a lot of our advocacy and recruitment efforts into a series of educational programs over the past few years. We've been fortunate to have a number of partners and success stories to present at those events and try to open the doors for more folks who might want to give OER a try. Open Education and OER general are still fairly new and growing fields so we're really hoping that we can provide clarification and assistance to anybody who might be interested.

**Omar Brown**

Chris, you have anything to say?

**Chris Hollister**

So, in terms of dollars and cents, we estimate the Studio has saved UB students about 1.3 million U.S. dollars in textbook expenses over the last few years. The studio's successes also include several peer reviewed journal articles. We believe that scientific investigation of OER use and its efficacy is necessary for securing broader institutional support for OER adoption and more generally for supporting other experiments and initiatives undertaken to improve access to, and the affordability of, higher education.

**Omar Brown**

This brings us to the end of our podcast. Chris and Joe, I want to thank you for joining us today.

**Chris Hollister**

Thank you.

**Joe Patton**

Thank you

**Omar Brown**

For additional information about the library's open and affordable learning programs and services. Members of the UB community are invited to visit the studio website at <https://research.lib.buffalo.edu/affordable-and-open> Or you can email [cvh@buffalo.edu](mailto:cvh@buffalo.edu) or you can email Joe at [jepatton@buffalo.edu](mailto:jepatton@buffalo.edu). We hope you enjoyed this episode of Libraries Out Loud. Stay tuned for our next look at UB libraries on campus.