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The Flavor of Open Access Over Rice: Tech Transforms & Transmutes Ed

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A few weeks back our law library decided to use a cookie cake tabling event to raise awareness for Open Access (OA) Week and distribute info about OA publishing and our university's grant opportunity for creating OA educational materials. What we thought would be a simple request from the nearby bakery turned into a giant mess as we were countlessly argued with about the copyright status of the OA open lock logo. Frustration and in hindsight total hilarity ensued. One thing was clear though: **we still have a LONG way to go in understanding and translating what OA is.**

Not long after that my family sat down to watch an early Ozu film: *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice*. Although the film's focus is on the differing attitudes of two generations and arranged marriage, the overarching **clash between tradition and modernity** is more applicable to OA than one might think. When you talk to people about OA, particularly educational platforms and resources (like textbooks) it can be a polarizing conversation. There is often a completely disconnect where no amount of explanation can resolve the issue – as was evidenced by our repeated conversations with bakery employees and a string of managers. *Every logo has a copyright, right?! It doesn't matter if it is the OA logo.*

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As with most things in this world, **technology is the catalyst for change**. We cannot slow down the advances in technology. Our modern tech is transforming our traditional means of education including the methods and the materials. With the rise of terms "learning object" in 1994 (Wayne Hodgins), and "open content" in 1998 (David Wiley) education has been transforming before our very eyes. Some of us have just tried hard to keep our eyes closed… like the couple in the film they were content lying to one another – but of course they were not actually happy.

We haven't been happy with the rising costs of educational materials for a long time.

Transforming: *A Short History of Open Educational Resources*

In 2001 MIT's OpenCourseWare (OCW) project aimed at putting their entire course catalog online. Partnering with Wiley at Utah State University, MIT's OCW utilizes self-organized communities of interest to set up a distributed peer support network. This is often credited as the start of the OER movement as shortly after in 2002 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) presents a *Forum on the Impact of Open Courseware for Higher Ed*. That same year the initial release of Creative Commons (CC) licenses emerges. These CC licenses are the most popular and widely used open licenses for open educational materials.

To be clear, **an open educational resource is a publicly accessible material that any user can use, re-use, improve and redistribute**. The creation of these resources is usually motivated by an underlying desire to change or improve our existing paradigm of education. Of course there is a ton of business and by extension money perpetuating the existing paradigm which includes traditional publishers, licenses and their products (like textbooks). Some obvious concerns with increasing OA and OER include quality and reliability of resources, as well as the access divide when it comes to supported devices, software and internet connections. OER allows for the potential for more access, but does not guarantee it. *Even when the educational resources are completely free for the user, does the user have the necessary technology resources to access it?*

Transmuting: *A Future of Open Access Textbooks*

This is where the platforms enter the playing field. Over the summer I attended an excellent session at CALICon titled *Leveraging E-Resources for Affordable Course Materials*. The presenters made an excellent case for lowering law students' economic burdens (something most of our institutions are aiming for) by leveraging existing e-resources. They shared a nice selection of tools for identifying or producing cheaper (if not free) course materials, including a glimpse of their own

Educational resources should be both quality and affordable – dare we suggest free?

spreadsheets for identifying comparable cheaper or free texts their school faculty had required in their courses.

One of the simplest strategies they suggested for encouraging faculty to create their own materials (including textbooks) was to use a blog platform. *Is there anything a good-ol' blog can't do?!* It seems too simple to be effective, but essentially the professor would make a blog entry as the course progressed, including their own content as text in the post and linking to freely available articles, media and other resources where appropriate. In the end they had a solid accessible "book" that they could go back into and edit or update as needed. The session also talked heavily about CALI's eLangdell (no surprise there, it was CALICon afterall!). I followed this rabbit hole of CALI's commitment to increasing access via computers to a 2012 article (you should read, or re-read if it has been a while) by John Mayer on saving students $150 million.

In addition to reviewing this session (the full video is available for streaming online), here is a list of resources including collections of open textbooks and platforms for creating or submitting open textbooks:

- CALI's eLangdell – Press publishes free, open eBooks for legal education.
- Open Textbook Library – Includes a nice selection of open texbooks, browse by subject and Submit page.
- OpenStax – Search by subject, completely free books platform and offers a nice app.
- Open Access Textbooks – Includes info on choosing a license and model for successful OA texts.
- OER License Generator – An interactive tool to use for when you want to combine multiple open resources with your own work, and then license your work for others to freely use.
- Model for Success – A 2012 draft model for Open Access Textbooks with a section on software tools.
- OER Commons – A Public Digital Library of OER for exploring, creating and collaborating to improve ed.
- LibreTexts – Open textbooks that are freely available to download, edit, and share initiated by UC Davis.
- OpenEd – Includes more than 300 titles with a browse by subject and links to create open textbooks.
- Open Textbook Store – A source for ready-to-adopt open textbooks (this is not a publisher).
- OASIS – Openly Available Sources Integrated Search tool for making the discovery of content easier (search by public domain books, videos, podcasts, learning objects, textbooks, course materials, and interactive simulations).
- MERLOT – Access to curated online learning and support materials including content creation tools.
- MOM – Mason OER Metafinder is a real-time advanced search tool for federated OER content.

I then felt completely at ease, like a burden had been lifted.

At the end of the film *The Flavor of Green Tea Over Rice* the two primary characters sit down to dinner. The wife, who throughout the film had badgered her husband for mixing his tea in with his rice because it just wasn't proper, finally tries it herself. She has **a moment of realization** – it goes beyond this petty matter of the *right* way to eat your rice. She tells him she finally understands, and he says it is OK.

Perhaps we'll someday reach this moment with OA and our educational materials and methods…that moment where a burden is lifted! Until that day comes, I encourage you to have more conversations with your colleagues about OA and OER. Just yesterday a survey invitation was shared via the Academic Law Libraries SIS. Taking part in this survey is just one small way we can help paint a better picture of OER in legal academia. **Here's the anonymous link to the survey with a deadline of Nov. 22nd:** http://lsu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eu4h4zRvUDk9kot

> *Open Educational Resources Study*
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> *This study consists of a survey to determine if faculty at law institutions are publishing open educational resources or using those created by others to offset the high cost of textbooks and casebooks. To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Respondents must be employed at a law institution within the United States. There is no risk in being involved in this study as respondents will be anonymous. Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. By continuing this survey, you are giving consent to participate in this study. If you have any questions please reach out to Kayla Reed at* kreed25@lsu.edu *or Karen Shephard at* shephard@pitt.edu.
>
> *This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Dennis Landin, 578-8692, or* irb@lsu.edu.

About Rachel Evans

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Tagged with: Creative Commons, OA, OER, open access, Open Access Textbooks, open educational resources

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