

Partnering for Impact

How Librarians and Faculty Co-Lead OER Initiatives

Academic librarians have long supported teaching and learning, but involvement in Open Educational Resources (OER) initiatives has opened new pathways for leading and supporting faculty development and created opportunities for librarians to collaborate on projects that promote course redesign, instructional innovation, and reflective teaching. In this article, we share how an academic librarian and faculty member have successfully collaborated to lead OER programming at our institution and offer practical takeaways for others in similar roles.

Our institution, Middle Tennessee State University, is a large public research university in the southeastern United States, serving approximately 20,000 students. Our collaboration on OER began several years ago when we were both in different roles, one of us working as a full-time, temporary faculty librarian and the other as an instructional designer. Now in tenure-track faculty positions, we continue to partner on OER initiatives, co-lead faculty workshops, and serve together on an institutional OER committee. This ongoing collaboration bridges the library and academic departments to support faculty innovation in the classroom.

In recent years, our library has intentionally focused on supporting student success through textbook affordability programs. In 2023, we created a new faculty position to lead OER efforts, developing a multifaceted strategy to promote OER adoption and creation across campus. This new OER role complemented an existing Library Textbook Program, which places copies of high-enrollment, general education course materials on reserve. The benefits of OER are numerous and commonly known, including empowering educators to expand their knowledge, foster collaborations, and support student success by making course materials more affordable and accessible. Through OER initiatives, academic libraries not only improve student access and affordability but also strengthen the university's position in the higher education landscape, attract students, partners, and funding and create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.¹

Our Collaborative Model

Higher education units and departments are consistently siloed; this is more the case with larger institutions but can be seen across campuses. Working together on OER initiatives with faculty and instructional designers allows for collaboration instead of duplication of efforts. Each of us brings unique skills and expertise to the table, and this collaborative work often takes place behind the scenes.

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For example, in the beginning stages of an OER initiative, librarians are often relied on for resource discovery. This expertise is especially helpful as librarians can often identify existing OER, saving faculty significant time and effort that would otherwise go into creating new materials. Librarians also bring a campuswide perspective on textbook affordability, situating OER within broader institutional priorities and serving as connectors, linking faculty to instructional designers and other campus partners. Additionally, librarians provide key expertise and support related to copyright and open licensing.

Faculty can provide subject-matter expertise, knowledge of common trends in areas of focus, and an awareness of the learning objectives for courses. They know what the students really need to know to be successful on a topic, course, or career, and instructional designers know the technology and often have a foundation in student learning. Instructional designers contribute to the alignment of content and activities with an outsider perspective to learning possibilities. For example, a “read this, write this, and take this test” structure does not tend to promote active learning.

Working with instructional designers can also provide a level of support in technology by creating H5P activities, enhancing accessibility, and promoting multimedia and multimodal learning resources. Often, faculty are unaware that potential OER is created every day through their lectures, presentations, resources, assessments, and learning activities. The instructional designer can work with faculty on enhancing these works and supporting the instructional technologies needed to create and openly share new resources.

By partnering across these roles, institutions allow for learning between professionals and reduce some of the anxiety associated with OER creation. Working closely with instructional designers or faculty who have previously created OER texts also addresses this concern.² As supported projects move forward and become visible, other faculty see what is possible and feel more confident engaging in OER work themselves, ultimately experiencing the benefits made possible through library and institutional support, including grants and other resources.

Designing OER-Focused Faculty Development

Keeping in mind that instructors have a lot on their plates, we intentionally designed our OER faculty development to be multipronged, offering workshops, faculty learning communities, and individualized support. This approach lets us meet faculty where they are and cast a wide net, accommodating different levels of interest and capacity for taking on an OER project.

OER Workshops

We co-lead a variety of OER workshops with the goal of building faculty confidence and capacity. We have co-facilitated three targeted workshops: Deep Dive into Creative Commons, Accessibility in OER Design, and Finding OER for Your Course. These sessions introduced key concepts in open licensing, inclusive design, and resource discovery while also encouraging faculty to reflect on how OER can align with their course goals. The workshops were offered through our faculty development center, which coordinated marketing, managed registration, and provided workshop space. Each session drew faculty from a range of disciplines. Recordings of each workshop were posted on both the library’s YouTube channel³ and the university’s OER website.⁴ Additionally, partnering with our faculty development center helped position OER as a campuswide initiative rather than a

library-only initiative. For faculty interested in a deeper engagement with OER, the librarian also facilitated a yearlong faculty learning community that met monthly.

OER Project Support

In addition to structured programming, we each support numerous faculty OER projects, providing guidance on licensing, copyright, project planning, accessibility, and publishing platforms. These efforts have been supported through statewide OER grants, grassroots projects, and a new internal funding opportunity funded by the Office of the Provost and administered by the library. The librarian, Ginelle Baskin, serves as the main administrator and support for the program, and the faculty member, Kim Godwin, has helped shape the program and served on the review committee. This incentive-based approach aligns with research showing that faculty are more likely to engage with OER initiatives when offered resources and guidance rather than mandates.⁵ In its first round, the grant funded three faculty-led projects to adopt, adapt, or create OER, and a second round launched this fall funding six new projects.

Institutional OER Committee

We also serve together on an institutional OER committee to expand the use of open resources, promote their value to the university community, and support policy development and outreach. This committee provides a platform for campuswide collaboration that aligns with institutional goals around equity and access. Baskin serves as a co-chair of this committee, and Godwin serves as a committee member. This committee originated as a “task force” within the library that later evolved into a subcommittee of a larger, campuswide committee under the Office of the University President. This arrangement has helped raise the visibility of the OER initiative on our campus and has provided a platform for sharing updates before a wider university audience, including high-level administrators. Specific committee activities include supporting the implementation of an OER grant program, improving OER course marking guidelines, planning Open Education Week programming, and promoting a student course materials survey.

Practical Takeaways

Based on our experience, we offer the following practical takeaways for supporting collaborative OER initiatives.

- *Don't go it alone. Build a cross-unit team.* By partnering with faculty colleagues, instructional designers, and other librarians, you bring complementary expertise to the process. Being an expert in a field of study does not necessarily equate to expertise in all areas, but there are resources to assist through other faculty and educational technologists.
- *Small steps can lead to a big impact.* Begin with one class and one topic, see what is already available, and begin there. This will help determine the gaps in resources that need to be created rather than adapted or curated. Remembering that all content does not have to be original supports the efforts of other researchers and authors for a more inclusive educational experience.
- *Leverage existing faculty development structures.* For example, partner with existing workshops, grant programs, or learning communities on your campus. This helps normalize the practice and build sustained interest.

- *Offer consistent programming to normalize OER.* Institutional programming should not be a one-and-done effort but rather an ongoing intentional process. For instance, by attending new faculty orientation, faculty senate meetings, tabling at campuswide events, and advertising your successes and wins, you keep OER in the spotlight. Additionally, consistently offering workshops, trainings, or writing retreats promotes long-term support.

Conclusion

OER can serve as a powerful entry point for librarians to collaborate on—and lead—faculty development initiatives and cross-campus partnerships. Our collaboration demonstrates how shared leadership across academic and library boundaries, grounded in complementary expertise, can support faculty in making pedagogical changes that advance equity and student success. Through these initiatives, our faculty have adopted zero-cost materials in more than 280 courses, reaching 36,000 students and saving approximately \$3.6 million in textbook costs.⁶ We hope our experience offers a replicable model for others seeking to build bridges between libraries and faculty development in support of open, inclusive education. //

Notes

1. Martin Ebner, Dominic Orr, and Sandra Schön, “OER Impact Assessment: A Framework for Higher Education Institutions and Beyond. Approaches to Assess the Impact of Open Educational Resources,” *Open Education Studies* 4, no. 1 (2022): 296–309, <https://doi.org/10.1515/edu-2022-0018>.
2. Md. Ashikuzzaman, “The Role of OER in Transforming Education: Opportunities and Challenges,” *LIS Education Network* (blog), June 11, 2025, <https://www.lisedunetwork.com/the-role-of-oer-in-transforming-education-opportunities-and-challenges/>.
3. Middle Tennessee State University, MTSU Open Educational Resources, videos, https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsJ4ZEMqDTNm3DgdnREKA7xv7XAUvXyYIx&si=DRsb_4sb75ehzFAC.
4. Middle Tennessee State University, “Open Educational Resources at MTSU,” accessed March 20, 2026, <https://www.mtsu.edu/oer/>.
5. Daniel Otto, “How to Promote the Use of Open Educational Resources (OER) in Higher Education. A Parley with OER Experienced Teachers,” *Open Praxis* 13, no. 4 (2022): 354–64, <https://doi.org/10.55982/openpraxis.13.4.264>.
6. Middle Tennessee State University, “ZTC Data Dashboard,” accessed January 12, 2026, <https://www.mtsu.edu/oer/dashboard/>.