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The Case for OER as the Advancement of Knowledge/Creative Expression

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The Case for OER as the Advancement of Knowledge/Creative Expression

To: Felix Ngassa, Chair of University Academic Senate

From: GVSU participants in the 2021-2022 AAC&U Institute on Open Educational Resources

Date: May 2, 2022

Request

consider adding the creation of Open Educational Resources (OER) to the category “Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression” in the Faculty Handbook’s examples of [Faculty Responsibilities in the Area of Scholarly and Creative Activity](#)¹.

Overview

The nature of scholarly and creative activity, at Grand Valley State University and across the higher education sector, is rapidly evolving. Amidst this ongoing transformation, the characteristics of OER – free access plus permission for adaptation – empower Grand Valley’s teacher-scholars to share their expertise with a global audience and simultaneously remove barriers to education for Lakers.

We argue that the creation of OER can demonstrate several of the forms of scholarly activity described by Boyer (1990) as well as the criteria established for the Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression category. By recognizing the potential for OER to meet the same criteria as peer-reviewed papers, scholarly books, or externally reviewed trade publications, the University Academic Senate will recognize and support faculty who engage in the significant intellectual and creative effort of developing high-quality, peer-reviewed OER.

Context

The authors of this memo are a faculty, student, and staff team participating in the American Association of Colleges and University’s inaugural [Institute on Open Educational Resources](#)². The Institute, and our work as participants, focuses on structural, institutional change to improve support for the use and creation of OER. We are also responding to a priority recommendation from the [2017-2018 student/faculty task force on OER](#)³: that the university better articulate how and when OER creation qualifies as a form of Scholarly and Creative Activity.

According to the Faculty Handbook, scholarly and creative work in the Advancement of Knowledge category “advances knowledge or creative expression in the field through two characteristics: (1) the product is in a publicly accessible format and is disseminated outside of GVSU, (2) the product utilizes a process to judge the quality and value of the contribution to the

¹ <https://www.gvsu.edu/provost/faculty-responsibilities-in-the-area-of-scholarlycreative-activity-148.htm>

² <https://www.aacu.org/event/2021-2022-institute-open-educational-resources>

³ https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library_reports/5/



discipline; this is generally through the use of peer review, but some disciplines may use other appropriate processes.”

Throughout this document we use the acronym OER as an umbrella term to apply to materials with a license granting free access and permission to adapt the work, which can also be referred to as open-source materials or open access materials. Currently, the only example of OER related work in the Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression category is

- Open-access scholarly works, if quality has been established through an appropriate disciplinary process

Examples given in the Scholarly Engagement category are:

- Open-access trade/practitioner works, if quality has been established through an appropriate disciplinary process
- Open-access trade/textbooks, if quality has been established through an appropriate disciplinary process

The examples can be (and are being) interpreted to mean that the creation of OER text materials cannot satisfy the criteria to be in the Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression. We believe that OER should be able to qualify as Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression.

What we Propose

There are two points to be made for OER to qualify for the Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression category: that creation of OER can advance knowledge or creative expression in the field, and that OER can be appropriately reviewed. Our specific proposal follows immediately, with rationale in subsequent sections.

Add an example to the Advancement of Knowledge/Creative Expression category:

- Appropriate open-access or open educational resources if the quality has been established through a review or validation process appropriate to the discipline.

Change the example about Open-access trade/textbooks under Scholarly Engagement to:

- Open-access or open educational resources that do not meet the requirements for the Advancement of Knowledge/Creative Expression category if the quality has been established through a review or validation process appropriate to the discipline.

Rationale

OER and Boyer's Model of Scholarly Activity

The faculty Handbook states that “Grand Valley State University accepts and employs the typology of scholarly activity that was first conceptualized by Boyer (1990)⁴.” and “These four forms of scholarship and creative activity shall be recognized by all units as equally valid forms of scholarship in decisions on tenure, promotion and salary increments.”

OER can demonstrate several aspects of the Boyer model of scholarship.

II. Scholarship of Integration. In creating OER material one can make connections between disciplines to demonstrate how different disciplines are related. As an example, an OER textbook in an upper level mathematics course could show how abstract mathematics can be used to produce musical compositions as in the symbolic music of Iannis Xenakis, which uses elements of abstract group theory to create and analyze musical compositions.

III. Scholarship of Application. OER can provide focus on how the ideas and methods of one discipline can be applied to solve problems in others. As an example, an OER textbook might demonstrate how ideas of linear independence and span from mathematics are important to understanding lattice-based cryptography. An OER author may also be involving the Scholarship of Discovery when researching and discovering unfamiliar applications and breaking them down to a level that a reader can understand.

IV. Scholarship of Teaching. Good OER will align with, support, and encourage effective teaching and assessment practices and apply these principles to the material being created. OER can extend pedagogy beyond traditional formats (e.g., using inquiry-based learning, active learning, or flipped learning) to provide new and innovative ways to present material. OER can be adapted to specific teaching contexts as well. For example: *Reacting To The Past*, aka RTTP, is an active learning pedagogy of role-playing games designed for higher education. 23 games are being used at GVSU by 15 faculty from 9 different programs. With RTTP, the game content is the tangible evidence of pedagogical innovation, recording the active learning elements developed for the course.

The context and content should make the case for a particular OER to meet the Boyer descriptions in one or more of these ways and be considered to advance knowledge or be significant creative expression.

OER and Peer Review/Validation

To qualify for the Advancement of Knowledge or Creative Expression category, a product must be publicly accessible, disseminated outside of GVSU, and undergo a process to judge its quality. The first two of these are easy to quantify. In fact, the whole point of OER is to be

⁴ Ernest L. Boyer (1990). *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

publicly accessible and be widely disseminated. A Grand Valley example is [Mathematical Reasoning: Writing and Proof, Version 3.0](#), which has been downloaded over 28,000 times since March 2020, in over 100 countries and at institutions including the University of Minnesota, Oberlin College, Ferris State, and the University of Warwick, England.

The third, a review process, can be accomplished in many ways. Such review can be the traditional peer-review or can be done through organizations that review OER. Leading examples of OER peer review and validation include:

- The American Institute of Mathematics reviews and endorses OER as part of its [Open Textbook Initiative](#)⁵.
- The [Open Textbook Library](#)⁶ features post-publication reviews of most OER it includes. According to their website, “Around 60% of books in the Open Textbook Library have been reviewed. In addition, most open textbooks are reviewed during production, using systems implemented by the authors and publishers.”
- Selected [items in the MERLOT OER repository receive post-publication peer review and endorsement](#)⁷
- [The Rebus Community's "contributor marketplace" forum](#)⁸ hosts frequent calls for peer reviewers for OE.

Perhaps a more effective measure of the quality of OER is adoption and use by other institutions. Widespread adoption should be considered a significant form of peer-validation. For example, [Active Calculus by Matt Boelkins](#)⁹ has been adopted by over 30 different high schools and colleges. Of course, this particular case of widespread adoption is exemplary and should not be the expected standard for OER adoption.

As with any scholarly or creative activity, it will be up to the individual faculty member to make the case that a particular OER product satisfies all of the criteria necessary to place their work in the Advancement of Knowledge/Creative Expression category, and the unit must agree. The change we propose will create space for individual faculty members and units to do so.

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⁵ <https://aimath.org/textbooks/>

⁶ <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks>

⁷ https://info.merlot.org/merlohelp/topic.htm#t=MERLOT_Peer_Review_Information.htm

⁸ <https://www.rebus.community/tag/cfp>

⁹ <https://activecalculus.org/>

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