A Research Brief about Sustaining Open & Affordable Textbook Initiatives

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Introduction

In the United States, the costs of textbooks are a continual national concern. Many educational institutions have recognized the need to reduce the cost of textbooks to enhance student success, and have taken various approaches to solve the textbook affordability problem, including implementing open and affordable textbook initiatives to mitigate high textbook costs. The initiatives could initially encourage faculty to use Open Educational Resources (OER) in their courses, but the continued effort to sustain proved difficult.

Research Goal

The research goal is to explore how higher education institutions sustain OER initiatives by examining the experiences and perspectives of the key players: faculty, administrators, librarians, and instructional designers who work on the front line of OER initiatives as OER users, educators, and advocates.

Methods

Exploratory two-case studies with qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and documents.

Findings

Student success, people's ideology, and interest in OER are the driving forces behind OER initiatives. A combination of efforts was needed from grassroots and top-down to sustain the initiatives. Successful practices include a combination of institutional incentives and support, connecting key players, and implementing faculty outreach strategies.

Themes are also identified for successes and challenges of sustaining initiatives. Successes include: (1) reducing costs for students; (2) helping faculty rethink courses and seek new ways of teaching; and (3) providing faculty freedom to customize for teaching as they desire. Challenges include: (1) experiencing difficulty in getting faculty on board; (2) needing a master database to increase OER discoverability; and (3) experiencing personnel turnover.

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