

The College of New Jersey
OER Task Force Final Report
April 2020

Overview

The College of New Jersey is a relatively small, selective New Jersey state college primarily focused on undergraduate education, with selected master's-level graduate programs. It currently enrolls 6,653 undergraduate students and 687 graduate students. The average class size is 21 students and the student/faculty ratio is 13:1. The vast majority of TCNJ's courses are taught and designed by individual professors with no commonly assigned course materials; this individual and adaptive approach to course design is a key part of the TCNJ student experience. It also helps to explain why TCNJ has not been as quick to adopt Open Education Resources as some other New Jersey state institutions. Our faculty and student surveys, however, have demonstrated that there is a great deal of enthusiasm about, and interest in, OERs at TCNJ, and we feel that TCNJ is primed to make large strides in OER adoption over the course of the next five years, resulting not only in significant cost savings for students, but also encouraging TCNJ's faculty and students to participate in developing their own OER materials for the public benefit. It's worth noting that OER adoption fits into one of the priorities of TCNJ's current Strategic Plan: to engage in “cost containment or cost avoidance” while maintaining the quality of our instruction and educational community.

Current Status of OER and Commercial Digital Learning Materials at TCNJ

In order to gauge the level of OER adoption at TCNJ, and to get a sense of our community's awareness of and attitude toward OER resources, the OER Task Force initiated online surveys of faculty and students and conducted in-person informational exchanges with the Faculty Senate and Student Government in the fall of 2019. We were pleased with the overall level of response to the surveys. Here are some of the key takeaways from these surveys:

Faculty

- Approximately 33% of the faculty respondents reported that they had used an OER during their career. Of these, 35% reported using a textbook; the other resources described by faculty span a wide spectrum, including many resources that don't technically fall into the definition of an OER.
- An overwhelming number of the faculty respondents who use OERs (or free resources of any kind) reported that they learned about them through a simple Google search or from

peers in their field. Almost none of them found these resources through an established, dedicated OER portal.

- Faculty who have used OERs (or free resources of any kind) mostly report being quite pleased with them (and presumably intend to use them again).
- A large majority of the faculty respondents indicated in their comments that they were not aware of the term OER and/or did not know what it means.
- A small, but not insignificant, number of TCNJ faculty are already involved in creating OERs in collaboration with peers in their field.

Students

- Approximately 84% of student respondents reported that they had never used an OER in any of their classes; 60% of those who had used an OER reported the resource was a textbook.
- Most of the students who had experience with OERs reported being quite pleased with them (and presumably would be open to using them again).
- 65% of student respondents indicated that they prefer print resources to online or electronic resources.
- When asked “To what extent do you feel that purchasing textbooks places a financial strain on you or your family,” on a 0-10 scale with 10 the highest extent, a large majority answered 5 or higher; approximately 19% answered 10.

These results indicate a complex picture of the needs and preferences of TCNJ's faculty and students. It's clear that TCNJ needs to do much more to raise the profile of OERs on campus and communicate to faculty that a) these resources exist, b) TCNJ wants to encourage their use, and c) assigning them can be facilitated through existing portals—it's not necessary to reinvent the wheel. Students at TCNJ (like college students through the US) clearly feel that textbook prices are a serious burden—which is not at all surprising, given how fast these prices have risen over the last two decades, in tandem with a rise in the overall cost of higher education.

However, TCNJ students also indicate a substantial preference for printed textbooks and other materials over electronic or online textbooks and other resources. There is [a body of evidence that indicates print has unique advantages over screens](#) (Jabr, 2013), even if electronic resources

have many other advantages: they're much cheaper and more convenient to produce, more portable, and more easily accessible. While it's not impossible to offer OERs in print, the vast majority of OERs are available only electronically. In order to maintain the quality of instruction at TCNJ, and make OERs available to as many students as possible, the College intends to explore all possible ways to make OERs available in print to students who want them. This might include offering free printing of OERs for students enrolled in a class that requires them or working with TCNJ's college bookstore to take advantage of its printing services.

As part of our survey of current campus conditions, the Task Force consulted with the management of TCNJ's bookstore, run by Barnes & Noble, and received a summary of BN's considerable OER offerings, which include:

- Options (and support) for faculty to locate OER resources through Enlight (the BN course adoption software TCNJ faculty already use to order books). Faculty Enlight will become AIP, Barnes and Noble's Adoption and Insights portal in January 2021. This is inclusive of OER from a variety of reputable resources as well as BNC OER+.
- First Day, an integrated program that provides OER materials to students at no cost (the college is charged on a per-student basis). First Day has the potential to reduce the cost of commercial digital learning materials pursuant to 34 C.F.R. s.668.164(c)(2) by including the cost of books as part of tuition, thereby allowing students to apply Title IV and HEA program funds towards the cost of books.
- Barnes and Noble Education OER Plus (BNED OER+), a courseware program that requires a \$25 charge, per student, per class, which provides OER resources and additional content customized for individual classes.

As far as we are aware, no TCNJ faculty has yet used any of these resources, so we have no data on faculty or student satisfaction with them. It's clear that TCNJ needs to explore all of these options as part of a larger plan to support OER adoption and production on campus.

TCNJ's OER Action Plan

After reviewing the current conditions on campus, the Task Force recommends that TCNJ take the following steps to maximize the use of OERs and digital learning materials on campus and lower the overall cost of textbooks for our students:

Personnel

TCNJ will create a standing OER Committee, composed of faculty, librarians, members of the TCNJ administration, student government representatives, and an advisor from the TCNJ Bookstore. This committee will be charged with:

- Increasing awareness of OERs on campus
- Assisting faculty in locating and adopting OERs
- Adding TCNJ-specific content to OpenNJ, a platform and database for OER adoption developed by VALE (New Jersey's academic library consortium)
- Working with our campus bookstore and BN to explore their OER offerings
- Doing additional research on enrollments and textbook adoptions to better understand TCNJ's specific needs, including student preference for print materials as opposed to digital resources.
- Addressing the logistical challenges of broadening TCNJ's use of OERs.

Workshops

The OER Committee will work together with VALE's [OER Ambassadors](#) to create a series of on-campus and virtual workshops on locating and selecting OERs, licensing and adapting content to produce new OERs, and better adapting existing OERs to TCNJ students' needs. These workshops can also include representatives from BN to facilitate adoption of their OER-related resources. As time goes on, it may be more appropriate to develop a series of specific workshops for:

- First time OER users—those who don't know where to start, don't know how OERs work, and are skeptical that they will work in existing courses
- Existing OER users who want to expand their use of OERs or their familiarity with OER databases
- OER creators: those who want to develop their own materials and need help with licensing, listing and advertising their materials, editing, and adapting their materials to different student needs.
- BN College staff who want to guide faculty in using their OER resources and the Enlight program (the course adoption software all TCNJ faculty use, which includes some integrated OER content).

Institutional Commitment

The TCNJ Office of Academic Affairs has committed to \$10,000 in funding per year for the next three years to assist faculty who want to develop their own OERs. The OER Committee will recommend how to award these grants, how many will be awarded every year, and how the resulting materials will be assessed; the Provost will negotiate the Committee's recommendations with the AFT Local.

Research

One of the OER Committee's principal tasks will be to collect and compile the data necessary to assess the level of OER use, and whether this involves adoption, adaptation or creation. This data will then be compared with current textbook use data to determine the level of cost savings to students. As the state has requested, the OER Committee will focus on the highest-enrollment classes and how OERs can be introduced to them, to achieve maximum cost savings for students. This will require some detailed data analysis and interviews with faculty (and perhaps other stakeholders) to identify the ways OERs can be best used.

References

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