OER AND OPEN EDUCATION FOR HIGHER ED: A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

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ABSTRACT

This presentation considers open educational resources (OER) from the viewpoint of an early mover in the latest wave of Open Education, the private nonprofit initiative Saylor Academy. We will look at how we at Saylor Acacemy became involved with OER, challenges faced, lessons learned, and observations for the wider higher education community.

Years before "MOOC" (Massive Open Online Course) became a buzz word with the advent of organizations like Coursera and Udacity, Saylor Academy was founded as a free, open alternative to traditional higher education -- an informal online school where anyone could get the "knowledge equivalent" of an undergraduate degree in the most sought-after majors. The Academy was conceived as an analogue to a university, if not a replacement.

The benefit of using OER to support this project was clear: with an ambitious original goal of creating 241 complete, college-level courses, OER allowed us to curate a high-quality, "evergreen" collection of learning materials. And with OER, Saylor Academy could remix and republish open content on our own servers, ensuring that our students would never lose access.

We saw benefits for others, too. Because our courses are built with OER and openly licensed themselves, anyone can adopt or adapt them -- allowing our work to evolve and thrive outside of our own walls.

Along with the benefits, difficulties emerged -- conflicting licenses, confusion about copyright in general and OER copyright specifically, diverse digital formats, mis-labelling, broken links, and so much more. The history of Saylor Academy is a history of wrestling with the promises and perils of OER -- it touches each of our initiatives and informs our expanding relationships with academia

Our founding mission was to serve students without access to education -- to make college-level learning free and ubiquitous for anyone who wanted it. But in the changing economic, political, and social landscape of higher education, Saylor Academy has a unique, innovative role in supporting not only students but also educators and institutions, and we have engaged with higher education institutions (HEIs) closely in recent years.

Operating outside the mainstream of policy, academia, "EdTech", and even much of educational philanthropy, Saylor Academy has a unique perspective on the whole, faciliating our work at the margins. If we began by curating open educational resources, we continue by curating relationships that help to fulfill the promise of OER.