# Open Educational Resource Advocacy: Examining Strategies and Resources for OER Supporters

Chelsee Dickson, Sabrina Davis, Jin Jo, and Kristina Clement*

It's not easy to bring an open educational resource (OER) into existence, and creators are sometimes dismayed when the OER they've been working so hard on does not gain traction with their intended audience. Once the OER—be it a textbook or other material—is produced, what's next? How will other educators know that the newly composed OER exists, and why should they want to adopt it for their classrooms? The library can help. Three academic librarians received an Affordable Learning Georgia Research Grant to conduct research on OER sustainability and advocacy. The grant team recruited a data analyst and together, they conducted a qualitative research study using an online survey instrument, receiving 62 responses from librarians and OER creators. Themes that emerged from the study include challenges (i.e., lack of time, energy, and support), communication and engagement (i.e., at events and other programming), and structured strategies (i.e., encouraging faculty and other creators to update their materials). Findings revealed practical strategies and resources for OER creators and advocates, including depositing into collections, making recommendations, and sharing via word of mouth and listservs. This article concludes with steps librarians and supporters can take to help OER creators design an advocacy plan and prioritize outreach.

## Introduction

As the price tag of higher education rises, promoting the discoverability of open educational resources (OER) becomes increasingly vital. The literature suggests two common barriers to OER adoption: lack of awareness about the existence of OER and the process of OER discovery (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The urgency is underscored by a 2021 Student Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) report showing that 10% of surveyed students missed meals due to impact

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factors related to COVID-19 and that 82% of those students also skipped buying textbooks (Nagle & Vitez, 2021). Simply publishing an OER is not enough: ensuring students are granted day-one access requires promotion, advocacy, and considerations of sustainability, which often fall outside the expertise of an OER creators' subject specialty. Libraries and librarians, both positioned at the intersection of OER, advocacy, and outreach, are in a prime position to support OER creators as they establish and maintain the sustainability of their work.

The research study investigated OER sustainability and advocacy, guided by three questions: How do librarians promote OER created by faculty? How do OER creators perceive the promotion of their work? And how are OER creators sustaining their work? Themes that emerged from this study include challenges, sharing, and promotion strategies. Findings revealed that, while librarians and OER creators and advocates cited challenges, such as lack of time, staffing, and institutional support, they continued to engage in outreach through events, innovative programming, and informal networks. Based on the results, the authors have discovered steps for librarians to help OER creators and supporters advocate for affordable education.

Promotion strategies identified include encouraging updates to materials, submitting OER for peer review, leveraging word-of-mouth recommendations, depositing in OER collections and repositories, and sharing on listservs. Strategic outreach and strong advocacy by librarians and OER champions can both go a long way in promoting open education to its fullest extent and attempt to address any perceived barriers (Woodward, 2017). The authors explore these solutions and demystify strategies for both creators and advocates, utilizing specific experiences advocating for open education at their respective institutions.

## Literature Review

Institution-level OER programs and positions dedicated to advocating for and promoting the creation of OER have expanded since the Cape Town Declaration in 2007 ("Cape Town," n.d.). Some institutions are in the beginning stages of their OER programs, while others have programs that would be considered mature (Curtis, 2024). Regardless of an OER program's maturity level, many in the open education space have begun to explore questions of maintenance and sustainability. For example, how can OER creators and advocates ensure the longevity of their OER programs and promote the sustainability of the OER created by faculty at their institutions? One suggested solution to aid in the sustainability of OER is to improve the discoverability of the resources. If faculty and librarians can easily locate available OER, the increase in OER usage due to ease of discovery could help librarians illustrate impact at their institutions. Another solution is the creation and use of sustainability models. Sustainability models for OER projects can be divided into two concepts: sustainability in terms of discovery; and sustainability in terms of production. While there are several resources available to librarians and other OER champions that outline how to advocate for OER initiatives, usage, and programs, these resources do not explain in depth how to advocate and plan for the distribution of OER post-production.

### *Barriers to OER Adoption and Promotion*

#### Discoverability Issues

One of the most-cited barriers to more widespread adoption of OER among faculty is the discoverability of resources (Swain & Pathak, 2024). Belikov and Bodily (2016) found that

faculty participants expressed frustration and serious concern about their ability to locate open resources. One participant of their study noted, "Material that is free and available needs to be marketed and collated in a database properly" (Belikov & Bodily, 2016, p. 240). Faculty in the study also stated that if they could overcome the barrier of discovery, they would likely be more amenable to adopting OER in their courses (Belikov & Bodily, 2016). Though there are many well-known OER repositories, such as OER Commons and the Open Textbook Library, other lesser-known repositories exist that allow faculty and librarians to upload or deposit OER. Unfortunately, many OER repositories remain difficult for faculty to find and navigate.

### Solutions to Discoverability Issues

One suggestion to improve discoverability is to improve metadata of OER in various repositories. Kessler and Pérez-Berenguer (2023) discuss the development and features of INDLeOpen, an open-source authoring tool that aims to assist authors with creating accessible and inclusive OER. INDLeOpen claims to assist with discoverability of the resources created on its platform by making use of a thesaurus to promote multilingual interoperability, as well as by sending all resources to an institution's institutional repository (IR) (Kessler & Pérez-Berenguer, 2023). Redirecting resources to the IR allows library personnel to review the metadata prior to publication. Burnett et al. (2023) also sought to address the discoverability issue by developing a hybrid metadata standard. This standard was based loosely on the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' Learning Object Metadata standard for learning objects and attributes (Burnett et al., 2023). Burnett et al. (2023) used this standard, as well as elements in their IR, to promote OER findability both in their IR and library catalog.

Another possible solution to OER discoverability barriers is to improve and connect various OER repositories. Otto and Kerres (2022) posit that, rather than creating more OER repositories, the open education community should focus on finding ways to connect the platforms that already exist. In their article, they use the concept of learning ecosystems to show how these connections could be made through metadata standards and plugins (Otto & Kerres, 2022). Otto and Kerres (2022) cite a study conducted by Tlili et al. (2021) that illustrates how the use of machine learning technologies and Natural Language Processing techniques can be used to automatically tag OER metadata, analyze tagged OER to map them together, and build OER recommendation systems.

## *OER Post-Production Sustainability*

Sustainability for OER programs at the institutional level is important, but so too is the sustainability of OER projects created within those programs. Much of the current literature discusses the importance of sustaining institutional OER programs and the need to consider sustainability when implementing an OER program (Whitchurch & Jensen, 2023); however, more consideration is needed early in the OER production process to plan how the published OER will be updated and accessed once it has been published (Nikoi & Armellini, 2012). One of the 2019 UNESCO OER recommendation areas included promoting the creation of sustainable OER models (Ossinannilsson et al., 2023). While many countries around the world have found ways to implement the UNESCO recommendation, Ossinannilsson et al. (2023) note that more needs to be done in this regard. Titli et al. (2023) explained that, when institutions develop one or more sustainability models for OER programs, the production

workflow of creating an OER should be separated from the distribution workflow of that now-published OER. OER production is a complex process, and distributing and promoting the newly published OER should be considered when creating a sustainability model and OER production workflow (Titli et al., 2023). As institutions are considering whether to implement OER programs, sustainability models and the inclusion of a workflow for the distribution and promotion of OER post-production should both be vital parts of the implementation process; the model used will likely depend on the maturity level of the OER program (Titli et al., 2023).

The literature reveals that one of the primary barriers to OER adoption for many faculty pertains to the discoverability of resources. There are multiple OER repositories in existence; however, they may not use the same metadata schemas. Therefore, creating metadata standards would aid discoverability. As these repositories are generally not connected to one another, one solution may be to use emerging technologies to link existing repositories. While improving discoverability may aid sustainability, the current literature suggests the sustainability of OER production practices should also be considered, including separating the planning of OER production from the planning of OER distribution. However, current literature does not address how librarians and faculty can promote and sustain OER post-production. There are numerous resources available to librarians and other OER advocates that demonstrate how to advocate for OER initiatives, OER usage, and OER programs; however, these resources do not explain in depth how to advocate and plan for post-production OER distribution.

## Research Design

### *Study Context*

This study sought to examine strategies and resources for the promotion and sustainability of OER from the perspectives of academic librarians and OER creators. The study used a mixed methods research inquiry methodology to investigate the experiences and perceptions of those involved in OER creation, advocacy, and sustainability. By focusing on the promotion, advocacy, and sustainability of OER, the research aims to provide actionable insights for the OER community with an emphasis on leveraging the intersection between libraries, OER creators, and outreach strategies. The research addresses a growing need to explore how OER can be effectively utilized to increase access to affordable educational materials.

The questions guiding the research study were:

1. How do librarians promote OER created by faculty?
2. How do OER creators perceive the promotion of their work?
3. How are OER creators sustaining their work?

### *Survey Development*

The research team developed a 15-question survey (see Appendix A) to address the research questions and capture the experiences and perceptions of OER creators and advocates. The survey, hosted on the Qualtrics platform, included both quantitative multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participant experiences with OER advocacy and promotion. Demographic questions were included to better understand the participant population and were limited to type of institution and primary job function. The survey consisted of 19 questions divided into three sections: (1) librarians promoting OER created by faculty, (2) OER creators' perceptions of the promotion of their work, and (3) strategies for sustaining OER. The research team asked colleagues who were

knowledgeable about the subject matter to review the survey and provide feedback on the questions. A small pilot of the survey took place, and five colleagues were invited to test the survey and provide feedback on both content and structure. The pilot participants were also asked to assume either the role of a librarian or an OER creator to test the various skip-logic incorporated to ensure specific participants received the correct questions. After minor revisions to the survey, participants were invited to complete the survey, which took approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and were assured of confidentiality through an informed consent process. The data collection period spanned 11 weeks, and the survey was monitored regularly to track responses. No personally identifiable information was collected, and the survey was anonymized to ensure participant confidentiality and privacy. The following definitions were provided to survey participants:

- OER: our definition of an OER is an openly licensed (i.e., public domain/Creative Commons) educational material that can be used, reused, modified, and redistributed for teaching, learning, and researching purposes free of charge.
- Creator: our definition of an OER creator is an individual (i.e., a librarian, faculty member, teacher, etc.) who creates or adapts an OER for teaching, learning, and/or researching purposes.

## *Ethical Considerations*

The survey was developed, and the research project and protocol were submitted to the Kennesaw State University (KSU) Institutional Review Board (with an Individual Investigator Agreement from the member of the research team from Texas Tech University) for approval. The research project and protocol were deemed exempt by the KSU Institutional Review Board (KSU IRB-FY24-323).

## *Sample and Recruitment*

The target population for the study included academic librarians, faculty members, and other individuals, such as university staff, adjuncts, or graduate students, who have either adapted, created, or assisted in the promotion of an OER within the past five years. Participants were required to be over the age of 18 and to self-identify as being part of one of these groups. To recruit participants, the survey was distributed through a variety of scholarly communication and library-specific listservs, including the American Library Association (ALA) Scholarly Communications listserv, the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Instruction Section listserv, and the SPARC OE Forum listserv. To recruit non-librarian participants, the research team leveraged their connections with Georgia- and Texas-specific OER listservs.

Convenience sampling was also used through the Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) listserv, which includes all persons who have received an ALG grant or who are associated with the organization. ALG is the funding agency for this research project, and the ALG listserv served as a convenience sample population. A recruitment email was sent to the listservs, outlining the purpose of the study and the criteria for participation. This recruitment method was selected to reach a broad and relevant audience of individuals actively engaged in OER creation, advocacy, and support. The survey was open for 11 weeks, from early February to late April 2024, with periodic reminders sent to encourage participation. The study received 98 responses that provided a diverse set of perspectives on OER promotion and sustainability.

### *Data Analysis*

A thematic analysis approach was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from the survey. After the survey closed, the data were cleaned by filtering out non-consent responses, insufficient entries, and potential bot responses. The remaining 62 usable responses were then grouped and categorized into relevant clusters, such as the type of institution, student size, and strategies for promoting OER. Each team member independently coded a selection of responses within these clusters, identifying key words, phrases, and recurring themes. The team then averaged their codes to derive major themes, focusing on the most prevalent patterns in the data.

After the major codes were derived, one research team member continued with coding the qualitative data. This process helped identify three major themes related to OER promotion: challenges, communication and engagement, and structured strategies. The use of multiple coders and averaging of codes ensured the reliability and validity of the qualitative analysis. Partially complete surveys were included in the analysis, depending on the level of completion, to capture as much relevant data as possible. Microsoft Excel was used to facilitate the analysis process, allowing for a thorough examination of participant responses. Microsoft Excel was used as the platform for analysis because it was the most accessible and freely available product across all the researchers' institutions.

### *Limitations*

While the study offers valuable insights into the promotion and sustainability of OER, it is subject to several limitations. First, the recruitment process relied on self-selection through listservs, which may introduce bias, as participants who are more engaged in OER advocacy may have been more likely to respond. Recruitment also relied heavily on academic librarian listservs and personal connections, thus limiting the number of non-librarian OER creators who had the opportunity to respond. Additionally, the survey instrument, despite being designed to capture in-depth responses, relies on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias.

The qualitative nature of the data analysis, while appropriate for exploring complex experiences, may also be influenced by the subjective interpretation of the researchers, despite efforts to ensure reliability through multiple coders. Furthermore, the study's findings may have limited generalizability beyond the specific population of academic librarians and OER creators who participated, particularly given the diversity of institutional contexts. These limitations suggest that while the study contributes to the understanding of OER promotion strategies, further research is needed to explore these issues in different contexts and with more diverse populations.

## Findings

### *Demographics*

The research team chose to collect only two demographics from participants: type of institution and primary position. Additional demographics, such as age, race, and gender, were not necessary for the focus of this research, though additional research into the perceptions and experiences of OER creators and advocates may wish to explore more granular demographics and identities. More than two-thirds of the 62 qualified respondents to the survey indicated they were either employed at a public academic institution with 20,001+ students (n = 20; 32%), a public academic institution with 10,001–20,000 students (n = 14; 23%), or a public academic institution with 5,001–10,000 students (n = 13; 21%). The remaining third

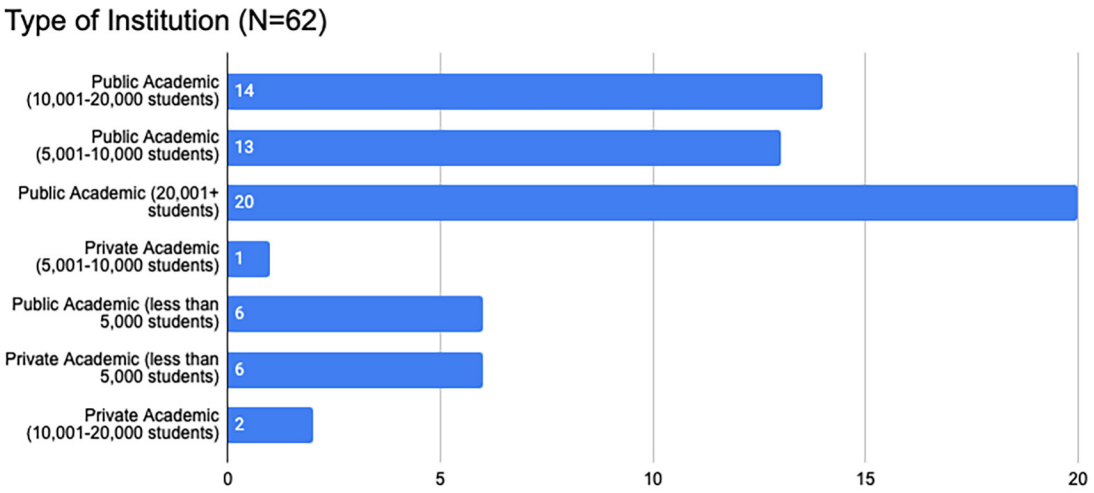



Figure 1. Type of Institution as Self-Reported by Respondents.

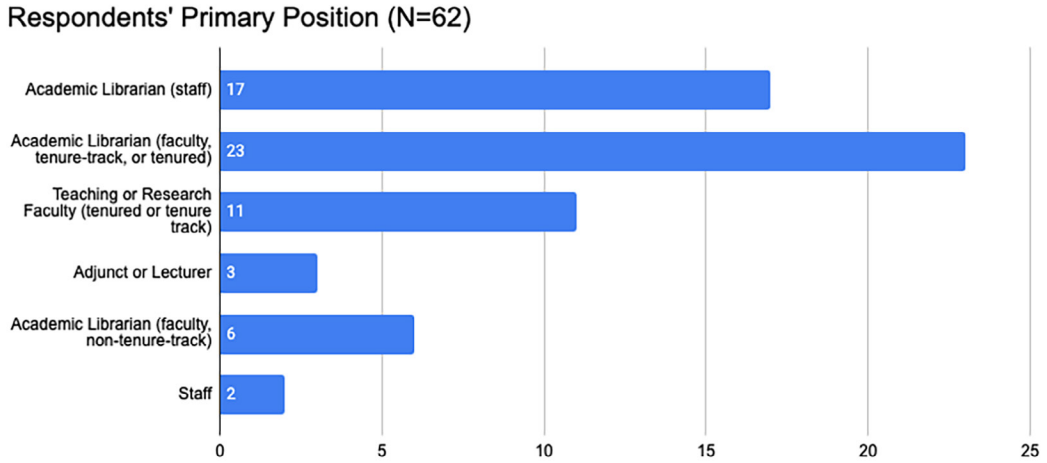



Figure 2. Respondents, Primary Position.

of respondents self-identified as being employed at private institutions. Figure 1 shows the distribution of institution demographics.

Due to the tendency to recruit via academic library listservs and academic library connections, it is no surprise that nearly two-thirds of respondents self-identified as academic librarians (n = 46; 74%). The remaining respondents (n = 16) self-identified as teaching or research faculty, adjuncts or lecturers, or staff. Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents' primary position.

## *Overview of Themes*

Three major themes emerged as the result of the qualitative survey data: challenges, communication and engagement, and structured strategies. "Challenges" describes the major challenges faced by academic librarians and/or OER creators in promoting and sustaining created or adapted OER. "Communication and engagement" describes the most common ways in which academic librarians and/or OER creators sought to share created or adapted OER in both passive and active ways. "Structured strategies" describes the ways in which academic librarians and/or OER creators make intentional, structured efforts to promote created or adapted OER. Table 1 details the code clusters associated with the major themes.

**TABLE 1**
**Summary of Themes and Code Clusters**

| Themes | Code Clusters |
|---|---|
| **Challenges** (i.e., major challenges faced by academic librarians and/or OER creators in promoting and sustaining created or adapted OER) | **1.** Perception<br>**a.** Myth/perspectives<br>**b.** Lack of...<br>**i.** Time<br>**1.** Priorities<br>**ii.** Energy<br>**1.** Too much work<br>**iii.** Support<br>**1.** Lack of funding<br>**iv.** Personnel<br>**1.** Siloed support<br>**2.** Lack of capacity<br>**v.** Creators<br>**vi.** Resources<br>**vii.** Content<br>**viii.** Interest<br>**1.** Disinterested faculty<br>**2.** Administrative challenges<br>**a.** Approval<br>**b.** Ignored solutions<br>**c.** Institutional support/mandate<br>**3.** No plan<br>**4.** Updating materials<br>**5.** Repeated attempts |
| **Communication and Engagement** (i.e., most common ways in which academic librarians and/or OER creators sought to share created or adapted OER, may be passive or active) | **1.** Word of mouth<br>**2.** Librarian<br>**3.** Conferences<br>**a.** Recognition<br>**i.** By faculty<br>**ii.** Annually<br>**iii.** By awards<br>**b.** Presentations<br>**c.** Local conferences<br>**4.** Events<br>**a.** Social networking<br>**b.** Competition<br>**c.** Presentations<br>**i.** Open Education Week<br>**5.** Websites<br>**a.** Institutional<br>**i.** OER websites<br>**b.** Discoverability<br>**i.** Institutional publishing and distribution<br>**6.** Social media |

**TABLE 1 (Continued)**
**Summary of Themes and Code Clusters**

| Themes | Code Clusters |
|---|---|
| **Structured Strategies** (i.e., the intentional ways in which academic librarians and/or OER creators make efforts to promote created or adapted OER) | **1.** Update material<br>**2.** Newsletter<br>**3.** Repositories<br>  **a.** General<br>  **b.** Specific<br>  **c.** Open<br>  **d.** Institutional<br>**4.** Peer review<br>  **a.** Efficient resource evaluation<br>  **b.** Rebus guide<br>  **c.** Guide for faculty<br>  **d.** Faculty reviews<br>**5.** Distribution<br>  **a.** Listservs<br>  **b.** Discipline-specific<br>  **c.** Curriculum specific OER<br>**6.** Partner or partnership<br>  **a.** Report to State<br>  **b.** Internal collaboration - Library partnership<br>**7.** OER staff or team |

## Theme 1: Challenges

The theme of challenges yielded five distinct code clusters: perception, administrative challenges, no plan, updating materials, and repeated attempts (see Table 1). Based on the data, the research team defined the top two code clusters within the theme of challenges as follows:

- Lack of: things respondents identified as missing that, if present, could lead to success in OER promotion, including time, energy, support, personnel, and interest.
- Administrative challenges: hurdles encountered at the administrative level, including approvals, ignored solutions, and receiving an institutional support or mandate (i.e., either having an institutional support or mandate or not having institutional support or mandate).

Participants were asked to share challenges faced in promoting OER and how they addressed them. While many participants reported challenges with top-down hierarchical approval for OER funding and support, the challenges of disinterested faculty and lack of both support and time were also present throughout the data.

The "lack of" sub-code cluster was the most significant within the "perception" code cluster. Of all terms related to the "lack of" sub-code cluster, time was frequently reported as a major challenge to OER promotion. As one participant noted, "Time is the biggest challenge. We are so busy with the adopt, adapt and create aspect that promotion is the last thing thought about" (Academic librarian, staff, public academic institution, 10,001–20,000 students). Another participant detailed various deficits in promoting faculty-created OER because of several factors, including lack of interest, lack of time, and lack of support:

> Some faculty have been disinterested in promoting their OER. Our teaching-focused institution doesn't prioritize maintenance of academic profiles. Most of all: time constraints (on both the faculty members' and my parts) limits what we're able to do, and the general lack of top-down administrative support for OER means other faculty around the institution are not receptive (Academic librarian, faculty, tenure track or tenured, public academic institution, 5,001–10,000 students).

Another participant gave a frank response detailing further the lack of interest from faculty in promoting created OER, indicating that OER creation at their institution stems from immediate need rather than strategic planning and alignment with institutional education goals:

> In reality, faculty are not interested in promotion. Rather what they are creating is more for immediate concerns (e.g., chair told them it has to be done, want their students to benefit). While bigger concepts of sharing with the world are great, faculty rarely have the bandwidth or support to promote their work (Academic librarian, faculty, tenure track or tenured, public academic institution, 20,001+ students).

Most respondents who detailed specific challenges to OER promotion and sustainability in the survey were academic librarians. Two respondents who self-identified as teaching or research faculty shared that their biggest challenges to sustaining the OER they have created are time and funding. Another respondent who self-identified as an adjunct or lecturer discussed the importance of buy-in as a challenge: "Faculty want to use what their colleagues use. If you don't have that one Faculty who leads the way then it is difficult to gain traction" (Adjunct or lecturer, public academic institution, less than 5,000 students).

Interestingly, respondents also discussed challenges within answers to questions that the researchers did not expect. For example, one survey question asked, "If you would like to, share specific examples of how you promote OER created by faculty at your institution," and one respondent answered, "Several faculty became 'agitated' when approached" (Academic librarian, faculty, non-tenure-track, private academic institution, less than 5,000 students). Another respondent to the same question answered, "We have no publishing support at our library, and I am the only person at the institution supporting OER and open education efforts (and it isn't my only job)" (Academic librarian, faculty, tenure-track or tenured, public academic institution, 10,001–20,000 students). That particular survey question did not prompt respondents to detail any challenges faced when promoting OER, yet multiple respondents took the opportunity to express frustration and detail specific challenges.

## Recommended Advocacy Strategy: Choosing a Promotion Strategy

The process of promoting an OER and sustaining its use is not without its challenges, as evidenced by the survey responses. Results of the study suggest that, while some librarians and creators do not participate in the promotion or sustainability of their OER, others utilize grassroots campaigns to market their work. Even though faculty and librarians generally do not have support, time, or a strategic plan, there are pockets of participants who engage in small but seemingly widespread campaigns to alert others to their OER creation. Creators

**TABLE 2**
**Librarian OER Promotion Strategies**

| Strategy | Frequency |
|---|---|
| Promoting through word of mouth (i.e., presentations, sharing the OER with other relevant faculty or departments, etc.) | 35 |
| Recommending OER to faculty looking for course texts | 34 |
| Encouraging creators to deposit or link their OER in their institution's repository | 29 |
| Encouraging your library to add the OER to an OER collection | 24 |
| Recommending OER to librarian colleagues outside of your institution | 17 |
| Emailing information about the OER to an OER listserv | 15 |
| Encouraging the creator to get the OER peer reviewed | 11 |
| University press releases | 9 |
| Social media promotion (from your professional or institutional accounts) | 8 |
| Encouraging creators to add the OER to their academic profile (i.e., Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCID, etc.) | 8 |
| Awards for OER creation | 8 |
| Promoting through the campus bookstore | 7 |
| Encouraging creators to promote on their own social media accounts (both personal and/or professional) | 5 |
| Encouraging the creator to submit the OER for review in journals that publish OER reviews and/or textbook reviews | 4 |
| Social media promotion (from your personal accounts) | 1 |

and librarians should persist to reach a wide audience and ensure the OER for which they are responsible makes it into the hands of those who will benefit from its use.

After conducting the research study and analyzing the results, the grant team identified various strategies for both librarians and creators to aid in the promotion and sustainability of their OER and to overcome the challenges. Top strategies include promoting through word of mouth and listservs, depositing into an OER collection, and recommending OER to faculty and librarians (see Table 2).

## Theme 2: Communication and Engagement

The theme of "communication and engagement" yielded six distinct code clusters: word of mouth, librarian, conferences, events, websites, and social media (see Table 1). Based on the data, the research team defined the top three code clusters within the theme of "communication and engagement" as follows:

- Conferences: attending and sharing about OER work at conferences, including recognition that may come from conference or association awards.
- Events: sharing about OER at events that may or may not be targeted to OER but are not necessarily conference-specific, including competitions such as institutional awards.
- Websites: sharing about OER on websites related to OER, both specific to the creator's institution and/or websites designed to collect and distribute OER.

Librarian respondents were asked, "Are there any specific campaigns and initiatives undertaken by your library to increase awareness of faculty-created OER?" to which they had the opportunity to share examples—some passive, some with intent—and report on perceived effectiveness. Many respondents reported that OER was promoted mostly through conferences and presentations delivered about the work that librarians have done to help faculty with OER and their OER experiences.

Events or event-like campaigns and initiatives were also discussed; several participants offered specific examples of innovative programming and mechanisms for recognition. One respondent detailed how their university uses email signatures to elevate the visibility of OER adopters and creators:

> We do multiple annual recognition events for faculty using and creating OER as part of a grant requirement we receive from our university's chancellor's office. We provide digital badges for adopters and creators to include in their email signatures (Academic librarian, faculty, tenure-track or tenured, public academic institution, 20,001+ students).

Another respondent shared about a recurring program promoting subject-specific OER:

> During Open Education Week, I co-host a virtual OER Showcase over Zoom in collaboration with another organization to promote new OER in French created by faculty and instructors from our institutions. We have done this for the last three years (Academic librarian, faculty, tenure-track or tenured, public academic institution, 20,001+ students).

Competition and recognition were oftentimes correlated with promotional events. One respondent reported, "We have an 'Are you a Textbook Hero?' campaign where faculty can nominate themselves or their colleagues as textbook heroes!" (Academic librarian, non-tenure-track, public academic institution, 20,00+ students). Several other respondents indicated that they did their best to encourage faculty to share and distribute the OER they create and adapt on websites to increase discoverability, such as institutional repositories and OER aggregates or collections.

## Recommended Advocacy Strategy: Word of Mouth

Communication, engagement, and promotion through word-of-mouth campaigns is a viable option to market OER to a wide audience. This strategy can include presenting about OER projects at conferences, workshops, departmental meetings, or other opportunities that engage the scholarly community to listen and learn. According to the study data, communicating through word of mouth was the most selected strategy for librarians when promoting OER. For creators, word of mouth was the second most selected promotion strategy. Furthermore, the study data reveals that word of mouth is a highly effective method of promotion, as evidenced in Table 2. Word-of-mouth communication and engagement campaigns play a significant role in changing and influencing the behaviors and attitudes of their intended audience (Siddike & Kiran, 2015) and, if used effectively, can result in success.

**TABLE 3**
**OER Creator Promotion Strategies**

| Strategy | Times Selected |
|---|---|
| Depositing or linking your OER in your institution's digital repository | 22 |
| Promoting through word of mouth (i.e., presentations, sharing the OER with other relevant faculty or departments, etc.) | 21 |
| Recommending OER to colleagues outside of your institution | 18 |
| Emailing information about the OER to a listserv | 16 |
| Encouraging your library to add the OER to an OER collection | 13 |
| Recommending OER to faculty looking for course texts | 13 |
| Partnering with your institution's librarians to promote your OER | 12 |
| Adding your OER to your academic profile (i.e., Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCID, etc.) | 11 |
| Social media promotion (from your personal accounts) | 7 |
| Awards for OER creation | 7 |
| Having your OER peer reviewed | 7 |
| Promotion through campus bookstore | 4 |
| University press releases | 3 |
| Submitting your OER for review in journals that publish OER reviews and/or textbook reviews | 1 |

Based on the data, a word-of-mouth campaign may be one of the most effective strategies (see Table 3). Firstly, those looking to utilize word of mouth must comprehend their institution's culture. It is beneficial to understand and analyze faculty and librarians' perceptions and feelings toward open education in general. Positive perceptions of open education can be leveraged to build further trust with stakeholders. OER creators and supporters should consider hosting educational workshops and trainings on OER, as well as crafting off-the-cuff elevator pitches that can be recited during spontaneous meetings with faculty, librarians, students, and others interested in participating in the open education movement. Many survey respondents identified challenges—including lack of time, energy, and support, among others—which can be significant demotivators to promoting OER. Word-of-mouth campaigns, however, can be a less time-intensive solution to spread news of recently created OER.

Institutional events can serve as opportunities to communicate and promote OER through word of mouth too. For example, OER creators and promoters might consider attending or hosting author receptions, also referred to as research and scholarship recognition receptions, that celebrate and highlight faculty research, scholarship, and other scholarly output (Makula, 2024). Such events may prove to be an effective venue for sharing OER to the institution's community. Another example: academic librarians and employees at KSU host events for Open Education Week and their All Things Open conference to encourage and highlight OER and the work of OER champions (Kennesaw State University [KSU], n.d.). Events are open to the wider scholarly communication and academic community, and several speakers have used this platform to promote recent OER projects. Events provide OER creators and supporters an opportunity to discuss the creation, adoption, adaptation, and support processes, which may in turn inspire their audience.

## Theme 3: Structured Strategies

The theme of "structured strategies" yielded seven distinct code clusters: update material, newsletter, repositories, peer review, distribution, partner/partnership, and OER staff/team (see Table 1). Based on the data, the research team defined the top two code clusters within the theme of "structured strategies" as follows:

- Repositories: both institutional repositories hosted and maintained by respondents' academic institutions and OER specific repositories outside of academic institutions.
- Promotion: general promotion primarily via listserv emails to highlight discipline-specific or curriculum-specific OER.

Most librarian respondents reported on their intentional promotion strategies by detailing how they encourage faculty to keep materials updated and peer reviewed; however, in several cases, respondents indicated that there is only so much a librarian can do. One respondent shared that, in addition to basic promotion strategies, they "help [the faculty member] think through the disciplinary avenues of getting the word out—but [the faculty member] really know[s] best on the disciplinary front" (Academic librarian, staff, private academic institution, less than 5,000 students).

This sentiment rang true for other librarian participants; a common thread was faculty OER creators doing the bare minimum for promotion of their work. The sentiment of "there's only so much we can do" re-emphasizes the sub-theme "lack of" within the major theme of "challenges." Insufficient time, energy, support, and resources directly impede librarians' effectiveness in supporting the creation, promotion, and sustainability of OER. Consequently, it was unsurprising to the research team that these deficiencies foster a mindset of inherent limitations on what librarians can achieve in this area.

It was encouraging to see the use of institutional repositories emerge from the data. Numerous librarian participants and some non-librarian participants mentioned utilizing their institution's institutional repository or other library-based resources. In response to a question about methods and strategies to ensure the sustainability of an OER project, one non-librarian respondent said that they work "closely with [their] university's library because they host the website that the OER is stored on" (Teaching or research faculty, public academic institution, 5,001–10,000 students). This collaboration highlights the pivotal role that libraries and their repositories play in sustaining OER initiatives, showcasing a successful strategy for long-term accessibility and support of open resources.

## Recommended Advocacy Strategy: Depositing into an OER Collection

Creators of OER should consider depositing a copy of their OER into a digital or print collection created specifically to house such materials. Supporters of OER should likewise consider encouraging their faculty or librarians to deposit their OER into such collections. Surveyed librarians ranked encouraging creators to deposit or link to their OER in their institution's repository, as well as encouraging the library to add the OER to an OER collection, as the third and fourth best strategies, respectively. Creators ranked depositing or linking their OER in an institutional repository as the best strategy overall. Digital promotion was listed in the top four most effective methods of promotion (see Table 4).

The researchers highly recommend creators and supporters utilize their institutional repository. OER can reach a much wider audience through deposit or linking in an institutional repository, much like an article in an open access journal (Langham-Putrow et al., 2021). The

**TABLE 4**
**Most Effective Methods of Promotion (n = 35)**

| Strategy | Times Selected |
|---|---|
| Word of mouth | 13 |
| Partnering with institutional and/or external partners (i.e., bookstore, librarians, journals, university presses, OER Commons, OpenStax, etc.) | 13 |
| Other | 5 |
| Digital promotion | 4 |

institutional repository may have a collection already in existence—for example, the OER collection at KSU (Digital Commons@ KSU, n.d.). Another example is Lindenwood University's institutional repository, the DigitalCommons@ Lindenwood, which has increased internal and external awareness of utilization of their small collection of OER, resulting in one OER textbook reaching 225 downloads in the span of five months (Hutson et al., 2022). Alternatively, OER creators and supporters may need to build a collection from scratch.

A prevalent sentiment among study respondents was that librarians are faced with the barrier of "there's only so much we can do." To assuage this burden, the researchers implore creators and supporters to collaborate with others in the library who may offer support in a myriad of ways. For example, those who intend to deposit or link their OER in their institution's repository should collaborate with the institutional repository supervisor, specialist, or other employees to create an effective workflow for deposit and linking. The institutional repository employees can assist in guaranteeing the OER will be added to the correct location and with the proper metadata to ensure the work is findable and discoverable.

Additionally, OER can and should be added to the general library collection. Creators and supporters of OER may consider further collaboration with the library's collection development librarian (or other library employees with collection development responsibilities) to incorporate OER into the library's collection. As OER formats include digital or print, either or both versions should be considered welcome additions to the library stacks and electronic shelves.

These themes illuminate the significant impact that systemic challenges have on librarians' ability to promote and sustain OER initiatives. The pervasive lack of time, support, and administrative backing not only hampers their effectiveness but also fosters a mindset of inherent limitations. Nonetheless, the successful collaborations between librarians and faculty, particularly through using institutional repositories, demonstrate a powerful avenue for overcoming these obstacles. Addressing these issues is crucial; by enhancing support and resources, institutions can unlock the full potential of OER, leading to greater accessibility, innovation, and equity in education.

## Discussion

Drawing on 62 survey responses from academic librarians and OER creators, the analysis surfaced three cross-cutting themes: persistent challenges (e.g., limited time, staffing, and uneven institutional support); common communication and engagement modes (e.g., events and informal networks); and intentional, structured strategies for advocacy (e.g., placing OER in repositories and intentional promotion). Findings converge on a small set of high-yield tactics,

with OER creators ranking repository deposit as their most frequent strategy for promotion. At the same time, respondents emphasized the salience of time and support constraints, which shape what is feasible and heighten the value of lightweight, repeatable actions to improve OER discoverability and sustainability. The discussion that follows translates these results into practical, context-sensitive guidance for librarians, OER creators, and OER supporters to strengthen advocacy, visibility, and long-term maintenance of OER.

## *Post-Production Advocacy and Sustainability*

This study advances OER scholarship by moving the conversation from production to post-production advocacy and sustainability. Whereas much of the literature describes how to build or evaluate OER programs (Boyle, 2023; Hollister & Patton, 2022; Petrich, 2020), this research elevates more concrete, lower-effort tactics that creators and librarians already employ and perceive as effective after an OER is released, with depositing into institutional or OER repositories, recommending published OER to colleagues, and leveraging word-of-mouth promotion. Recommending OER was among one of the most frequently selected strategies, and librarians are well-positioned to operationalize this strategy by spotlighting faculty-authored OER in department meetings, weaving tailored recommendations into one-on-one consultations, and highlighting relevant OER in newsletters or departmental emails. Faculty creators can complement these efforts by directly recommending their materials to their peers, offering a brief overview of the content at department meetings, and linking to the OER in syllabi. By naming post-production strategies and linking them to the constraints respondents reported, this research helps move OER advocacy beyond awareness and into true sustainability. A simple recommendation can go a long way, as this study's results evidenced.

## *Implications for Practice*

Across the sample, respondents did not describe using a formal, written post-production plan to promote or sustain newly published OER. Those who did mention post-production promotion could not give concrete examples of intentional forethought. This absence may reflect limits of the sample and survey instrument; however, it also appears consistent with respondents' reliance on ad hoc tactics that they view as useful but that they apply unevenly. Alongside a literature base that emphasizes producing OER or evaluating programs, these patterns suggest that the post-publication period warrants more attention, as do the conditions that make structured follow-through unlikely.

The authors cautiously interpret the "why not" as a mix of time constraints, diffuse ownership of promotion tasks, and uneven administrative support for OER reported by participants. In response, the authors offer—not as a prescriptive model but as a practical suggestion—a simple, role-aware approach to post-production planning that OER creators and supporters, including librarians, may adapt locally. The intent is to translate familiar, lightweight actions into routine, time-bounded steps that could help move advocacy beyond general awareness and toward more sustainable visibility and use for both librarians and OER creators.

The findings point to a practical tension: librarians are well-positioned to enable OER promotion and sustainability, yet they often lack time and staffing to *own* promotion end-to-end. Rather than arguing that librarians should be the sole promoters of OER, the authors suggest a shared-responsibility model that reflects this study's collected evidence. In this model, librarians contribute where their leverage is highest (e.g., repository deposits and

metadata quality, discovery, light guidance on communication channels, and building relationships), while creators and other campus units activate discipline-specific networks and amplify OER work. This reframing aligns with what respondents do now and acknowledges the resource constraints they reported. Because the landscape of post-production options may feel overwhelming to OER creators, a librarian's most realistic and valuable contribution may be curation and coordination, rather than doing everything. Future research is needed to determine what kinds of post-production plans are the most effective and most considerate to the limited time that both librarians and OER creators often have.

## Conclusion

Without a deliberate plan for promotion and advocacy, OER often fail to reach their intended audiences. Many creators and supporters struggle to gain visibility for their work, leaving OER underutilized despite their potential. This study examined the perspectives of academic librarians and OER creators through a qualitative survey and identified three central themes in OER promotion: challenges, communication and engagement, and structured strategies. The findings indicate that, while some librarians and creators engage in grassroots campaigns to promote their work, many lack the institutional support, time, or personnel needed to sustain OER advocacy efforts. Effective communication and engagement and structured strategies most often included word-of-mouth outreach, the use of listservs, depositing materials into OER repositories or collections, and recommending OER to faculty and colleagues. However, the absence of systematic planning likely limited the reach and long-term sustainability of these efforts. This research highlights the need for integrating advocacy and sustainability planning into the OER creation process itself, rather than treating promotion as an afterthought. Future studies might further explore mechanisms for embedding these practices into institutional workflows, OER grant programs, and professional development. Ultimately, while OER have significant potential to advance affordability and accessibility in higher education, their long-term impact depends on creators and supporters adopting intentional, collaborative, and strategic approaches to sharing and sustaining their work.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare no conflicts of interest in terms of research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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# Appendix A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

## Section 1: How do librarians promote OER created by faculty?

1. What strategies do you (as a librarian) employ to promote OER created by faculty members at your institution? (select all that apply)
   - ○ Emailing information about the OER to an OER listserv
   - ○ Encouraging creators to deposit or link their OER in their institution's digital repository
   - ○ Social media promotion (from your personal accounts)
   - ○ Social media promotion (from your professional or institutional accounts)
   - ○ Encouraging creators to promote on their own social media accounts (both personal and/or professional)
   - ○ Encouraging creators to add the OER to their academic profile (i.e., Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCiD, etc.)
   - ○ Promoting through campus bookstore
   - ○ Promoting through word of mouth (i.e., presentations, sharing the OER with other relevant faculty or departments, etc.)
   - ○ Awards for OER creation
   - ○ University press releases
   - ○ Encouraging your library to add the OER to an OER collection
   - ○ Encouraging the creator to get the OER peer reviewed
   - ○ Encouraging the creator to submit the OER for review in journals that publish OER reviews and/or textbook reviews
   - ○ Recommending OER to librarian colleagues outside of your institution
   - ○ Recommending OER to faculty looking for course texts
   - ○ Other (please describe)

2. If you would like to share specific examples of how you promote OER created by faculty at your institution, please share them here.

3. Are there any specific campaigns or initiatives undertaken by your library to increase awareness of faculty-created OER? Please share anything that you or your library does that helps promote awareness of faculty-created OER.

4. When working with faculty who are creating OER, do you help them create a promotion plan for their OER once it is published?
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

5. If yes, please tell us about your experience and process of helping faculty create a promotion plan.

6. How often do you engage with faculty members to discuss the promotion of their OER? (select the option that best describes your average engagement)
   - ○ Daily
   - ○ Weekly
   - ○ Every other week
   - ○ Monthly
   - ○ Semesterly
   - ○ Yearly
   - ○ Never
   - ○ Other (please describe)

7. What challenges have you faced in promoting OER, and how have you addressed them?

## Section 2: How do OER creators perceive the promotion of their work?

8. As an OER creator, how satisfied are you with the current promotion of your work?
   - ○ Very satisfied
   - ○ Satisfied
   - ○ Dissatisfied
   - ○ Very dissatisfied

9. What strategies do you (as an OER creator) employ to promote your OER? (select all that apply)
   - ○ Emailing information about the OER to a listserv
   - ○ Depositing or linking your OER in your institution's digital repository
   - ○ Social media promotion (from your personal accounts)
   - ○ Social media promotion (from your professional or institutional accounts)
   - ○ Adding your OER to your academic profile (i.e., Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ORCiD, etc.)
   - ○ Promoting through campus bookstore
   - ○ Promoting through word of mouth (i.e., presentations, sharing the OER with other relevant faculty or departments, etc.)
   - ○ Awards for OER creation
   - ○ University press releases
   - ○ Partnering with your institution's librarians to promote your OER
   - ○ Encouraging your library to add the OER to an OER collection
   - ○ Having your OER peer reviewed
   - ○ Submitting your OER for review in journals that publish OER reviews and/or textbook reviews
   - ○ Recommending OER to colleagues outside of your institution
   - ○ Recommending OER to faculty looking for course texts
   - ○ Other (please describe)

10. If you would like to share specific examples of how you promote your OER, please share them here.

11. In your opinion, which is the most effective way to promote your OER? (select one)
    - ○ Word of mouth
    - ○ Digital promotion
    - ○ Partnering with institutional and/or external partners (i.e., bookstore, librarians, journals, university presses, OER Commons, OpenStax, etc.)
    - ○ Other (please describe)

12. How often do you promote your OER? (select the option that best describes your average engagement)
    - ○ Daily
    - ○ Weekly
    - ○ Every other week
    - ○ Monthly
    - ○ Semesterly
    - ○ Yearly
    - ○ Once only after release
    - ○ Never
    - ○ Other (please describe)

## Section 3: How are OER creators sustaining their work?

13. What methods or strategies do you use to ensure the sustainability of your OER projects? (i.e., ensuring the reuse, relevancy, and longevity of your OER 3+ years into the future).

14. Have you partnered with any organizations or individuals to sustain your OER work? If so, can you briefly describe these partnerships?

15. What challenges have you faced in sustaining your OER, and how have you addressed them?