News from the Network
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Upcoming Events
- Nov. 5, 2021 Annual Fall Forum *From Pivot to Permanent*
- Dec. 7, 2021 Webinar: Applications & Strategies for Implementing Equity-Centered Assessment
- Jan. 19, 2022: Webinar: From Stationary to Stacked – Assessing Modular Content
- Mar. 25, 2022 Dialogues in the Disciplines

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Featured Board Member Blog:

"Understanding what DEI institutional support looks like for stakeholders" by Mamta Saxena, Ph.D.

COVID-19 and the recent social unrest in the country have heightened the need for higher education institutions to better serve the marginalized population. Access to education as well as the opportunity to successfully complete the educational journey should not be contingent on race, class, or gender. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) vision and strategies set by higher education institutions must be efficiently implemented if we are looking for truly transformative impact and change. Meaningful change will require institutional support from both top-down and bottom-up. DEI efforts should be integrated within the fabric of the institutional policies and practices, not to mention commitment at all levels (from the president to Deans and faculty). Institutions need applicable

Featured Board Member Blog (cont.):

processes and tools to effectively work on the DEI initiatives. The amount and kind of institutional support will dictate the level of DEI related curiosity and passion among faculty, staff, and students. What does DEI institutional support look like?

Institutional leadership's belief and commitment to DEI is key to weaving it into the institution's mission, vision, core values, and most importantly the strategic plan. The university's academic plan should be grounded in a strategy that will promote DEI efforts throughout the institution for all stakeholders: faculty, staff, and students. The mission and plan should be integrated at all levels and units and clearly stated and communicated within each unit.

Questions to ask:
Does the unit's leadership have the same vision? Is it part of the unit goals and strategic plan? Is it part of my goals?

Consistent DEI language is another critical factor to facilitate collective understanding and accurate interpretation of the mission and strategy. Unpacking the terms and loaded concepts like anti-racism, as well as having a shared understanding of DEI definitions institution-wide is key. Several councils and committees working on just defining what DEI means for the institution are a good start. However, it is a whole different challenge to translate DEI efforts in the context of teaching and learning for faculty and students. The crucial areas to address are content selection, course design, pedagogy or teaching methods, and assessment.

Question to ask:
Have you had conversations at your institution about how it all translates into what you should do differently as faculty when you design, teach and assess your courses?

Most importantly, having access to meaningful data to act upon and make changes happen is fundamental for DEI efforts. Just like with assessment, we can create excitement and curiosity with the right kind of data. If we can present meaningful evidence and expose the gaps, we can get buy-in from key stakeholders and act upon the findings. An equity data audit can identify various groups at risk of being affected by inequitable policies and practices, from faculty, staff, adjuncts to wage workers and students. Investigating the individual journey of each one of the groups will help uncover processes that promote inequities from hiring, promotion, recruitment, to retention. Such an exploration will assist in the needs assessment to see what data is being collected or not collected and if analyzed to be useful. Primarily, the people who drive policy and practice change should have access to the findings.

Question to ask:
Does your unit have access to assessment data on student outcomes (performance, perception, completion rates) that you can disaggregate to identify access, retention, excellence, and completion issues with underrepresented populations?

Featured Board Member Blog (cont.):

However, data-informed decision-making is not given just because you have data at hand. Transparency and clear communication around what is being collected and why is essential along with easy access to the data visualization. Data literacy training is another consideration to help make sense of the data to see the gaps. Only when we can connect the data with how it impacts the learner experience, we can identify concrete areas to address the gaps.

The strongest institutional support will come from the willingness to reflect upon personal belief, systems, policies and practices with an equity lens. *Are we willing to take part in the self-reflective journey? Are we willing to acknowledge and accept the equity gaps when we find them? Are we willing to adapt to address the gaps for transformative change?*
(This blog has been posted on the *NEean Blogs & Discussions page,* where replies are encouraged to keep the conversation going.)

Guest Blog:

"Remixing Open Textbooks Through an Open Textbook Lens (ROTEL)" by Jessica Egan, Millie Gonzalez, Bob Awkward, Susan Tashjian, Jackie Kremer, Marilyn Billings, Chelsea Contrada, & Elizabeth McKeigue

Remixing Open Textbooks through an Equity Lens (ROTEL) is a grant-funded program at a consortium of six Massachusetts community colleges and public universities that will support the creation and adoption of existing open textbooks using an equity and inclusion lens. The program will create accessible and intentionally inclusive open textbooks and other open educational resources (OER) that reflect students' local and lived experiences to improve student learning outcomes. These open educational resources (OER) will also result in significant cost savings, making college more affordable for Massachusetts students.

The consortium, called the Open Textbook Coordinating Council (OTCC), is comprised of six institutions: Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University, Holyoke Community College, Northern Essex Community College, Salem State University, and Springfield Technical Community College. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE) is also a partner. The OTCC received a highly competitive $441,367 grant from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to fund this innovative program. The program will give particular focus to publishing culturally-relevant materials for courses in highly enrolled general education courses, as well as professional and career courses. The program also aims to demonstrate that underrepresented students will achieve higher academic outcomes if free, culturally-relevant textbooks are available to them.

This project represents a significant shift in how Massachusetts public higher education has addressed the issues of

increasing open educational resources (OER). To date, we have focused on increasing awareness through faculty education and training in order to increase the adoption of existing resources. While this effort has been helpful in reducing textbook costs for students, there are many disciplines in which there is still a paucity of open textbooks for courses linked to our labor market. Most importantly, the increasing diversity of our public higher education student population demands that we provide students and faculty accessible, intentionally inclusive textbooks that reflect and honor their lives. The impact, we propose, is improvement in student achievement.

The value of adaptation or redesigning existing open textbooks to be more inclusive is significant; especially for students of color. At our six pilot institutions, students of color average 41 percent of the population. Forty-three percent of students in the six institutions in this Consortium are first-generation students. Textbooks being used in Massachusetts do not reflect the student population in Massachusetts that is using them. **Remixing open textbooks to be accessible to students with disabilities, intentionally inclusive, and to represent our student populations is the main goal of this proposal.**

- **Goal 1** is increasing the number of open textbooks that are accessible, intentionally inclusive, and representative of the student populations.
- **Goal 2** is improving student learning outcomes, particularly from underserved communities, by offering no cost, intentionally inclusive,

high-quality open textbooks and materials in high-enrollment general education courses and career and professional courses.
- **Goal 3** is ensuring scalability, longevity and expanding the use of these OERs throughout the state and beyond.

In order to determine the effectiveness of the project and its impact on student learning, an assessment framework was chosen and key performance metrics were created.

Assessment Framework
Grant administrators from the six institutions adopted the COUP Framework, the Open Education Group's methodology to study the impact of open educational resources. This method looks at impact based on four areas: Cost, Outcomes, Usage, and Perceptions. The COUP Framework allows for a more comprehensive view of OER beyond the more common cost savings metrics. The Perceptions area is particularly applicable to the project. One question we will be exploring is: What do faculty and students think about, and feel toward Open Educational Resources that are more accessible, inclusive and representative?

Performance Metrics
Performance metrics were created that align with the goals of the project and fit with the COUP framework. Performance metric data will be gathered by each institution and then combined to reflect the performance of the project. The following table shows examples of some of data that will be collected. A notation of (C), (O), (U), or (P) indicates the metric is associated with an area of the COUP Framework.

Guest Blog (cont.):

Performance Metrics (Quantitative)	Goal 1, 2, 3	Additional Data related to the Performance Measures (Qualitative)
The number of students who enrolled in courses that use the materials (C) (O)	2	
The number of students who completed courses that the used materials (C) (O)	2	Student Perceptions Survey of Inclusive OER Survey (P)
The DFW (D's, F's or withdrawal) rate in courses that use open textbooks and/or ancillary materials (O)	2	Student Perceptions Survey of Inclusive OER Survey (P)
The number of faculty/instructors that use the materials (C)	1,2	Faculty Satisfaction with OER Creation Survey (P
The number of consortium institutions, and the number of institutions outside of the Consortium, that adopted the open textbooks (C)	1,2,3	
The average grade of students who completed a course that used materials developed through the grant compared with the equivalent average grade of students that used commercial textbooks (O)	2	Student Perceptions Survey of Inclusive OER Survey (P)
The average cost savings per student (C)	2	

With commitment and interest from six institutions across the state, the possibilities for collaboration and data comparison are fruitful. In addition to tackling a number of student success barriers, data will be at the forefront of this programming from start to finish - evaluating the impact across the state in terms of cost efficiency, effectiveness of CRP implementation, and achievement of student learning outcomes.

"[T]here's a bigger-picture benefit of not requiring people to pay for knowledge," Bovbjerg said. "I'm a big proponent of open access to information in general. Not everyone is in a privileged position. Open access materials help to democratize knowledge." Tyler Hansen

(This blog has been posted on the NEean Blogs & Discussions page, where replies are encouraged to keep the conversation going.)

CREATING INCLUSIVE OER

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

1 PARTNER WITH AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER AND/OR LIBRARIAN

Partner with an instructional designer to discuss your overarching goals for course design and content implementation. Allow them to give feedback on your outcomes and intentional alignment to course content. Discuss the specific pockets of information that you're hopeful to locate and/or curate.

Cultivate effective partnerships with your librarians. As you identify the gaps in your courses, it is very likely you will not find the information in current textbooks. Librarians can offer expertise in identifying the resources that will address these gaps. Prepare clear, well defined goals with your instructional designer and communicate these goals to content experts on campus.

2 REVIEW INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH DATA

Institutional Research data provides a detailed look into your student demographics. This information can provide you insight to overall Pell-eligibility, breakdowns by ethnicity, enrollment trends, and programmatic trends across your campus. It is recommended to review your IR data annually to observe trends and adjust your curriclulum accordingly.

3 IDENTIFY GAPS

Be cognizant of OER materials that reproduce or perpetuate the inequitable educational structure they seek to dismantle. The affordability of OER can increase accessibility for marginalized learners, but implementing OER in the classroom that are heavily colonized and center a white patriarchal epistemology does nothing to increase or foster equity for marginalized learners. It merely gives marginalized students increased access to an educational environment that continues to systemically devalue them. It is a barrier to student success when students don't see themselves represented in their educational curriculum. It is not equitable to force marginalized students to engage with open materials that devalue their experiences, their communities, their epistemologies.

4 LOCATE, CURATE, AND WRITE

Shop around! Ask your librarians and instructional designers for avenues in locating OERs. When you've found a mix of items you'd like to include, discuss the layout and design for the final product. If you are unable to find relevant, culturally responsive materials, decide if you are able to contribute to the OER community with your experiences and perspectives. Library staff and instructional designers can also help you figure out the best publishing platform for your needs.

5 ASSESS EFFICACY & ITERATE

Successfully implementing equitable OER materials is an iterative process. Collect data on relevant student success metrics to gain insight into the efficacy of your OER implementation. Disaggregating this data along demographic lines will provide further insight into whether specific student populations are experiencing lower success rates than others. A data-driven approach to assessing OER efficacy will allow you to target your future revision efforts on areas in most need of improvement.

6 SHARE REMIXED CONTENT

As you continue to refine open materials to meet the needs of your specific population, it is critical that we remember to contribute our work to the greater OER community. Applying a Creative Commons license will allow others to benefit from the customized package of content you've implemented.

The President's Corner:

"How Beer Led Me to Assessment, Instead of the Other Way Around"
by Craig Pepin, Ph.D.

This is the story of the curious path that took me from a graduate school obsession with brewing and judging beer, to an interest, and eventually career, in assessment. This apparently random linkage was something I realized somewhat belatedly, well into my assessment career. But the more I started to think about it, the more complex the linkages became. Moreover, I've come to believe that there are some things that the world of beer judging can actually teach us about assessment too.

But let's start at the beginning. What came first was actually beer making, a hobby I acquired at the same time I started graduate school. I think it was the blending of science and art in brewing thatI found most compelling, and fairly quickly I started to enter homebrew competitions. Surprisingly, there is often a shortage of beer judges at competitions, and so at my first competition I was pressed into service.

Beer judging, for the uninitiated, is not some bacchanal, but rather a highly structured endeavor. Beers are presented to the judges without any clues as to origin, at the same temperature (which varies according to style), and judges do not drink more than several ounces of each entry. In competition, beers are scored on a 50 point weighted scale covering aspects such as color, clarity, aroma, and different components of the flavor profile such as bitterness and mouthfeel. In other words, a rubric.

Another aspect of beer judging is that beers are judged based on how true they are to a particular style of beer. It is not a question of merely taste. Instead, homebrewers attempt to brew beer to match the characteristics and flavor profiles of styles like India Pale Ale (IPA), Bohemian Pilsner, Munich Dunkel, or Stout. And they are judged accordingly - a very good stout that was entered as a pilsner would earn a terrible score. In other words, standards.

Training to become a certified beer judge is more demanding than you might think. The process is governed by the national Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP). Judges must acquire a deep understanding of all aspects of the beer making process, the different characteristics of the styles (the latest style guide includes over 100 distinct styles), and the chemical and biological origins of beer flavors both desirable and undesirable.

After months or years of preparation, aspirants take a three-hour written exam testing their knowledge of styles and brewing process, which also includes scoring several beers, including at least one that is spoiled in some way. Their score indicates what rank they can attain, but attaining most ranks also requires gaining experience points through judging at regional competitions.

The President's Corner (cont.):

I found the complexities of judging beer to be fascinating. Judges don't just have taste preferences, but also are sensitive to different elements in the flavor profile. I have always been particularly sensitive to staling compounds in beer that is not fresh, while my friends would be better at distinguishing different hop varieties by taste or aroma, or were more sensitive to other types of off flavors.

So, how did all these lead me to assessment? And what lessons from beer judging did I carry over into my assessment work?
Well, beer judging is not always fun - flaws in the brewing process can lead to some very off-putting flavors, and judges have to train themselves to recognize those and provide feedback to the brewer. I've had more than a few undrinkable entries over the years. Yet the crucial point is an educational one - helping brewers get better - so the connection to teaching was immediate and obvious to me. And of course, I was introduced to the power of rubrics in that teaching capacity.

Beer judging also got me to think a lot about interrater reliability. On the one hand, rubrics and training provided a way for greater reliability, as the BJCP exam showed me. But also, it soon became obvious that *perfect* reliability across evaluators was never going to be attainable, and that was alright. Human expertise and judgement remains critical in areas where the key elements are not measurable by a machine, and that's as true for higher education as it is for beer. The outcomes we really care about in higher education - the ability to communicate,

to think critically, to welcome diversity - require trained judgement: Some "noise" in the resulting data will always be present.

Another lesson was in the humanistic dimensions of standards. In the mid-90s, I became involved in the first major revision of the style guidelines where I had to convince my fellow committee members that beer styles both evolve over time, and are human constructs, not absolutes. As most of the others on the committee were engineers (which homebrewing tends to draw in inordinate numbers) who like black and white answers, this was something of an uphill battle. And despite imperfections, standards could provide crucial guides to practice, while leaving many paths open as to how to achieve them. Many different combinations of hops, malt, yeast, water and process can produce an award-winning American Pale Ale.

And that is a lesson I have thought about quite a bit in the last five years, as I have been deeply immersed in developing institutional learning outcomes for my institution. For one thing, our college competencies represent the educational expression of our institutional values. They have to be specific to our context and meaningful for our faculty and staff - and that can only emerge from a process of dialogue and communal collaboration, in which historical precedents and faculty preferences play an important role. At the same time, teaching to standards does not mean teaching exactly the same way. Instead, there are many paths a teacher can choose from in

The President's Corner (cont.):

helping students to meet general standards. Vive la difference!

I don't recommend mixing assessing student work and beer! Still, I've found that beer judging deepened my appreciation of fine ales and lagers at the local brewpub, and eventually led me down a professional path that I didn't expect to take, but that has proven to be intellectually stimulating nonetheless.