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Allow OERs to Help your Students Today

What are OERs, and why do more professors, like yourself, need to consider incorporating them into their classrooms? Open Educational Resources, or OERs, are free, open-access resources professors use to provide more relevant and current material that also doesn't break their students' bank accounts. These resources are helpful for students with different learning styles, and little money, and OERs also benefit teachers who need extra information to give to their classes. As a professor, you have the opportunity to use lesson plans, Ebooks, videos, study guides, and plenty of other free resources. By using more OERs in your classroom, you will notice a peak in interest from your students, and possibly even a peak in their GPAs. Dr. Elodie Jones, assistant professor in the Advanced Education Program at FHSU, gives us a look into her success with fourteen years of using OERs.

Jones offers a few wise reasons why she wanted to help her students save money. "The main reason I did it [offered her students OERs] is because students spend so much on textbooks, and when they go at the end of the semester to return them, they only get five to ten dollars back . . . I did it for the cost effectiveness, and also for the access to the most relevant and current information. We as professors should be contributing to this body of knowledge for our students' sake," says Jones. The price of print books can often be the biggest problem for young adults attending a university. Students here at Fort Hays State University will often buy their

books for hundreds of dollars, and seldom use them. Being a student myself, I have spent roughly \$300 on books that I was told I would need before the semester began, and yet I was never instructed to read from them once. The books sit somewhere in the corner of my room just waiting to be used, and often will never be touched again. For many college students, a book with an access code can cost around \$200, and often, it won't be used once. Then, when it comes time to return the book, the student is given a crisp ten-dollar bill. This is disheartening, and will eat away at a student's will to learn. I truly wish Jones' incorporation of OERs could have been spread to many of the professors I had during my freshman year.

Saving money is a great way to gain your students' attention, but OERs can offer so much more for your classroom. When it comes to processing ideas and learning new material, not every student learns the same way. By throwing a textbook in front of each student and expecting them to absorb all of the material, you will essentially set your learners up for failure. "Even if you want to still use the textbook," Jones says, "there are so many ways to use little pieces of OERs to fill in some information gaps for your students. Also, we have to consider that not all learners learn the same way. Your textbook may not even be effective for some learners. Some students may need to see video, or they may need to do something hands-on. It doesn't mean that you have rewrite your entire class to use OERs."

Consider giving your students more options. Rather than requiring that your classes buy books from a bookstore, you could mention the possibility of a free Ebook. Your students can save money and have new resources to learn from. You can still offer the print book for those who prefer having the information in their hands. This leaves rooms for your students to decide what is best for them. Jones reminds us that "you'll save your students a lot of money,

and still give them that option to buy the book in person, or let them stick with an Ebook for free.”

Aside from saving your students money and meeting their educational needs, you will be accessing even more relevant information than before instead of potentially using an outdated text. Sure, new textbooks are released annually, but plenty of information can change throughout that year. The beauty of technology is having a constantly updated and refreshed source of information right at our fingertips. With an OER, your classroom will get just that. Consider how incorporating a few OERs could benefit your classroom today, and your students are sure to thank you for it. The Forsyth library has a librarian specializing in OERs, and she would be more than happy to help you find what you need! If you have any questions or need help starting your journey towards OERs, contact Claire Nickerson at (785) 628-4543 or email her at cenickerson@fhsu.edu.