

Executive Summary

The NCSU Libraries requests \$49,981 to explore the need for and ideal components of a subject-specific, simple, flexible, and scalable “toolkit” for the creation of open textbooks. In consultation with stakeholders such as the American Psychological Association, the University of North Carolina Press, Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG), and the new preprint service PsyArXiv, the NCSU Libraries will design and conduct a nationwide survey, as well as a series of targeted focus groups, interviewing faculty and students working in the domain of psychology.

Statement of Need

The escalating cost of college textbooks has become a huge barrier to education for students. Textbook costs have outpaced inflation by 300% over the last 30 years, and the average college student spends about \$1,200 per year on textbooks. As a result, 7 out of 10 of college students have forgone buying a textbook because of cost, and 94% of those who have expressed concern that doing so would impact their grades. Providing students with access to free, openly licensed, educational resources can significantly alleviate the financial burden of textbook costs.

Though studies have shown that students perform as well or better in courses using Open Educational Resources (OERs) (<http://sparcopen.org/open-education/>), teaching faculty members at American universities are hesitant to replace their course materials with open resources. The 2016 Babson Report: *Opening the Textbook: Open Education Resources in U.S. Higher Education, 2015-16* (<http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/oer.html>), a survey of over 3,000 faculty members, found that only 5.3% of courses are using an openly licensed resource as a required textbook. Faculty members cited their biggest barrier to using OERs in their courses is a lack of availability of existing resources. Faculty members who had previous awareness of OERs also expressed concern about the quality of materials. New, high-quality, trusted resources are needed.

The intent of this project is to gather information about the practices and needs of instructors and learners in psychology who may be interested in adopting or creating open textbooks and OERs as well as identifying gaps in support for these experts that make it more difficult to create robust, tailored materials. The project will also explore student needs and desires in learning resources, and whether or not a toolkit approach would serve the needs of educators and their students specifically in psychology.

The Babson Report identifies motivations for participation and barriers to entry for faculty who may adopt or create OERs. This research addresses the IMLS project category of a national digital platform by focusing on the foundational work needed to improve our understanding of user (educators and students) needs in OER creation, adoption, and use. These activities will identify the extent to which such a toolkit is needed, the components of the toolkit, the potential obstacles to its adoption, and the partnerships and promotional activities that would accelerate its use. This study focuses on the domain of psychology based on demonstrated need in this discipline and close working relationships with stakeholders at North Carolina State University, the national professional association, and the cutting-edge preprint archiving service.

The outcomes of this planning project include a final report, actionable recommendations, and research data about the practices and needs of a specific scholarly community (psychology), related to the creation of tailored educational materials, particularly open educational resources. The project findings and this data will help a broad range of scholars, students, librarians, and publishers better understand what supports are needed for subject-experts to create these resources, which have been endorsed by the Department of Education

(<http://tech.ed.gov/open-education/>) and meet a pressing need for students in higher education and around the world.

Budget

The proposed budget for the planning project includes salaries and fringe benefits for William Cross, Lead Principal Investigator; Mira Waller, Co-Principal Investigator; and Lillian Rigling, NCSU Libraries Fellow for 5% of their time over the course of the project year (total of \$16,446) and graduate student time to assist with the design and administration of the survey and focus groups at 20 hours a week for one semester (total of \$5,215). Also included is travel funding for two people to conduct focus groups at a national conference related to psychology and at four geographically diverse academic institutions, as well as for two people to present the project findings at a domestic conference. Each trip is budgeted for airfare, hotel, meal per diem, conference registrations when necessary, and local transportation. Travel is budgeted at \$15,750 for 10 trips in total. The indirect costs of NCSU are assessed at 33.6% and equal to \$12,570. The total requested budget from IMLS for this planning project is \$49,981.

Proposed Work Plan

The NCSU Libraries will collaborate with the stakeholders identified above on this planning grant to conduct a needs assessment and gap analysis of faculty use and development of OERs. They will gather this information from instructors and students through a national survey and through focus groups at four locations including national professional conferences and universities in diverse locations across North America.

Additionally, the survey will show how the availability and use of existing and proposed resources and support mechanisms - such as training programs, collaboration on workflow processes, and innovative use of technology - impacts the motivation and ability to create OERs. Finally, the survey will inventory existing relationships between faculty and support institutions such as libraries and university presses that could help increase creation, use, and sustainability of OERs.

Evaluation and Dissemination Plan

The success of this planning project will be defined by researcher and scholarly communication communities' evaluation and recognition of the importance and value of the results of the proposed research. Findings of the project will be distributed at library and information science, psychology, and open culture conferences through poster and panel presentations. In addition, findings of the project and design recommendations based on those findings will be published in peer-reviewed journals. The generated datasets will be anonymized, deposited with an open data repository, and distributed freely together with the preprints of related presentations and publications from the project's website so that interested researchers and practitioners could replicate the study, evaluate the validity of the project's outcomes, and/or use them in the development of best practice guides and policies.

Follow-up and Future Research

The intended outcomes of the proposed project are (1) quantified measures of use and comfort with OERs; (2) further coordinated and strengthened working relationships between the project's partners, and across communities of practice; (3) new evidence of existing challenges, needs, and potential opportunities for the creation of OERs in the discipline of psychology; (4) transferrable information about faculty use and comfort with open education and textbook design; (5) methodology that is scalable to other domains and disciplines; (6) useful directions for other organizations, collaborations, and funders to pursue in advancing support for open educational resources; and (7) the foundation for a collaboration between the NCSU Libraries and University of North Carolina Press, who will begin preparing a toolkit based on the recommendations from the data.