MARYLAND OPEN SOURCE TEXTBOOK *Initiative*

Faculty Perceptions of Openly Licensed Materials' Impact on Student Access and Ease of Transition to Emergency Remote Teaching During COVID-19

Survey Findings

Overview

In the Spring of 2020 we surveyed faculty across Maryland to understand the extent to which they believed open educational resources (OER) did or could have improved students' access to instructional materials and eased their transition to emergency remote teaching in response to COVID-19.

Survey Respondents

The survey was emailed in Spring 2020 to the Maryland Open Source Textbook (M.O.S.T.) initiative mailing list, a total of 2,414 higher education faculty and staff across Maryland.

- We received 251 total responses, a 10.4% response rate, with respondents representing 27 Maryland institutions, including 15 2-year colleges, 10 public 4-year universities, and 2 private 4-year universities (see below).
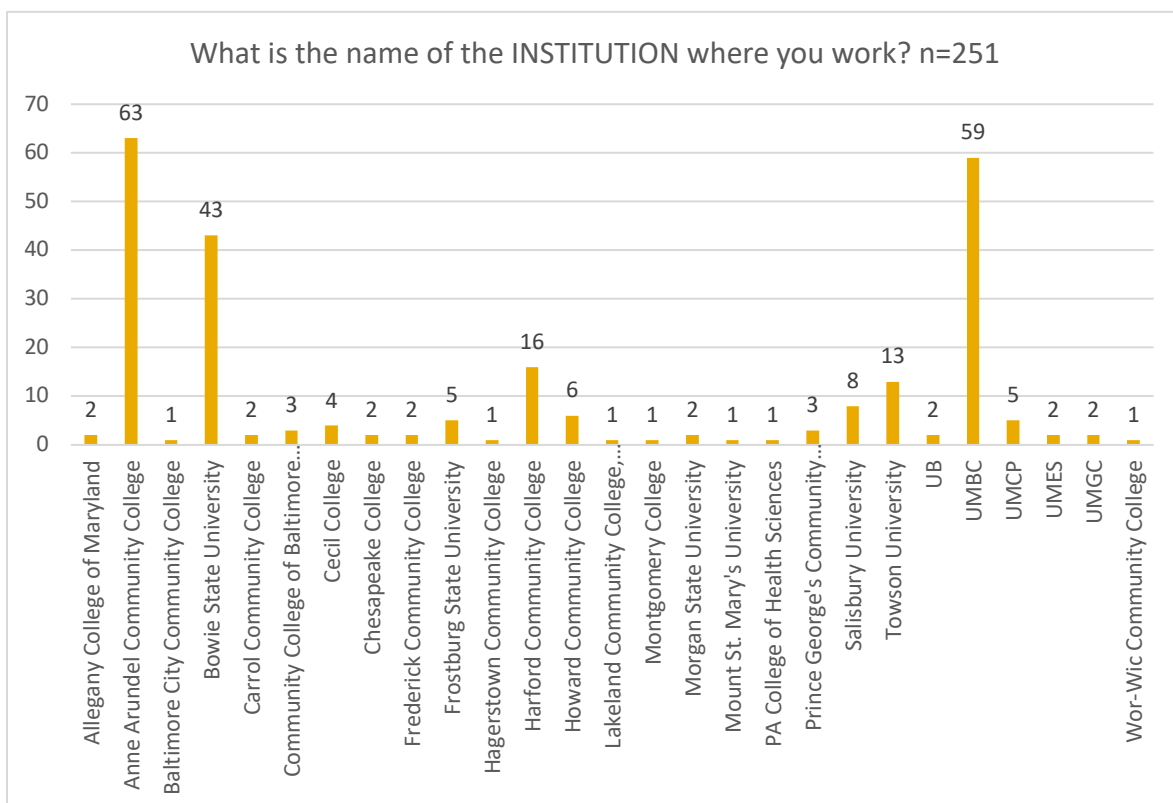

- Because the survey went to both faculty and staff, our first question asked whether the respondent had taught a class in the spring semester. Ninety eight percent (246) of survey respondents had taught a course during the Spring 2020 semester.

Use of OER in Spring 2020 semester courses

After providing a detailed explanation of what OER is and how it can be used, the survey then asked respondents if they used OER in any of their courses during the Spring 2020 semester.

- 41% (104) responded that they had used OER in their Spring 2020 courses
- 55% (138) responded that they had *not* used OER in any of their Spring 2020 courses
- 4% (9) did not respond to this question

Did you use OER in any of your courses during the Spring 2020 semester? n=251

Response	Count
Yes	104
No	138
No Response	9
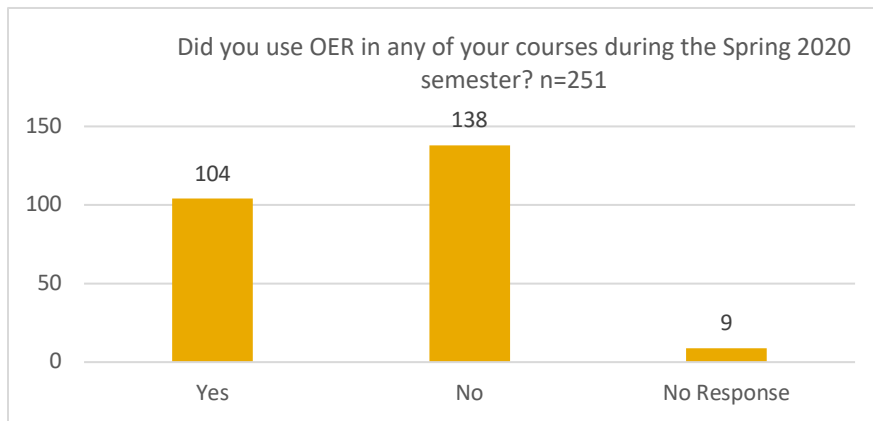
Among those who *did* use OER:

Of the 104 respondents who <u>did</u> use OER in their Spring 2020 semester courses, 80% (83) felt that incorporating OER into their course made it easier for students to access instructional materials during the COVID-19 shutdown.

Do you think incorporating OER into your course made it easier for students to access instructional materials during the COVID-19 shut-down? n=104

Response	Count
No Response	1
No	20
Yes	83
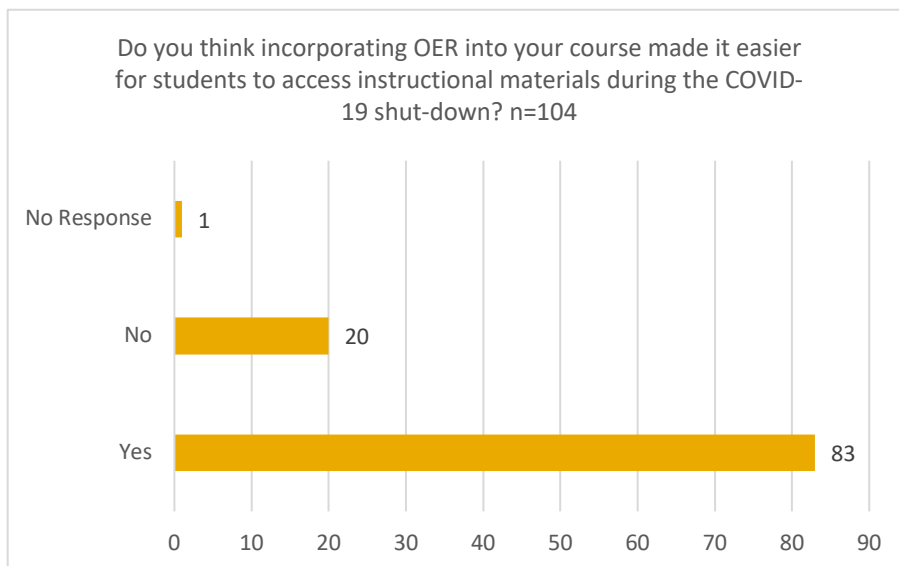
In response to our request for further explanation, many of the respondents pointed to **the convenience of accessing the resources directly from anywhere** and **the importance of easing students' financial burden** as key factors in enabling students to access instructional materials during the shutdown.

Everything was instantly available to them online through Brightspace. No buying things, tracking things down, leaving textbooks at school (I teach Early College).

When I used to use assigned course texts that students needed to purchase, I found that often some students would share in order to save money. This would not have been possible during the shutdown.

Additionally, some of the respondents indicated that they were already using OER to some degree prior to the COVID-19 shutdown mid-March, so their students were already familiar with this approach in face-to-face classes, which eased the transition.

Of those who used OER in their Spring 2020 semester courses, 19% (20) did not feel that incorporating OER into their course helped students to access instructional materials. For the most part, this was a timing issue. Respondents felt that students already had the instructional materials they needed for the course, given the shutdown happened midway through the semester. Others who used OER in their courses responded that a lack of high-speed internet access hampered the ability of some students to access the OER.

I had students with slow internet at home or no laptops and just their phones, so some of the materials for the courses, I had to modify or make optional due to difficulty with students being able to access the materials online.

Respondents who had incorporated OER into their courses were somewhat split when asked if incorporating OER into their course made it easier for them to transition to remote teaching during the Spring 2020 semester.

- 61% (63) felt that incorporating OER made the transition to remote teaching easier
- 38% (40) felt that it did not make the transition any easier

Do you think incorporating OER into your course made it easier for you to transition to remote teaching during the Spring 2020 semester? n=104

Yes: 63	No: 40	No Response: 1
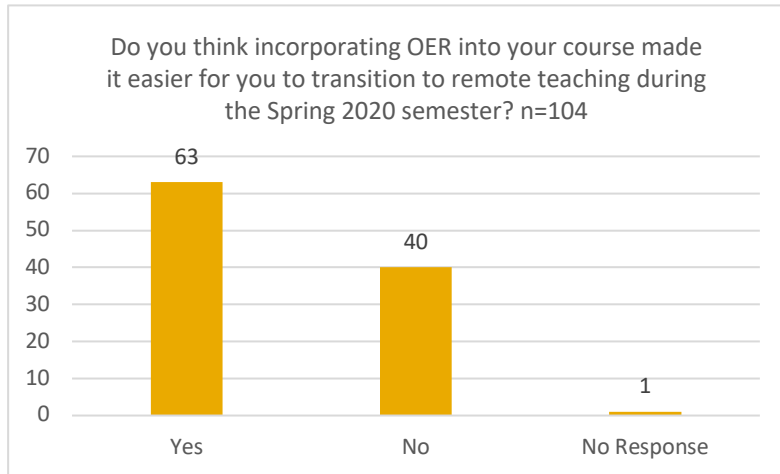
One of the primary reasons that respondents stated it was not "easier" was due to the time and effort involved in developing or locating openly licensed materials, uploading them into the LMS, and curating content. Others noted that, since they were already using OER to some degree, the shutdown did not make it easier or more difficult for them.

Find(ing), curating, posting, maintaining OER is never "easier".

I have been teaching online and using hybrid methods for years, and the transition was smooth for me. I just would not use the word easier.

Some of the respondents who believed that incorporating OER made the transition to remote teaching easier for them noted the following key factors that aided the process:

- the wide availability of additional resources helped if students had difficulty with the material;
- the adaptability of the resources across technologies.

One respondent felt the transition to remote was made easier with OER, but noted that some of this was due to his/her own personal experience and familiarity with openly licensed materials:

> *Not really because of the materials, but because of the skills I have in locating materials for the course. All of a sudden, students could not complete observations in schools, etc. due to the shut down, so I had to look for alternative materials. Because I have a number of OER courses, I am used to doing that and know different resources to look for (both how to look and where to look). I think having OER's help with being able to quickly pivot if needed.*

Among those who did *not* use OER:

Overall, 55% (138) of those who taught a course during the Spring 2020 semester responded that they had not used OER in any of their spring courses. This group was asked if they thought OER might have made it easier for their students to access instructional materials in their courses during the COVID-19 shut-down. Forty-two percent (58) responded that they were not sure if OER would have improved student access to instructional materials.

Do you think OER might have made it easier for students to access instructional materials in your course during the COVID-19 shut-down?
n=138

28

43

58

9

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not Sure ■ No Response
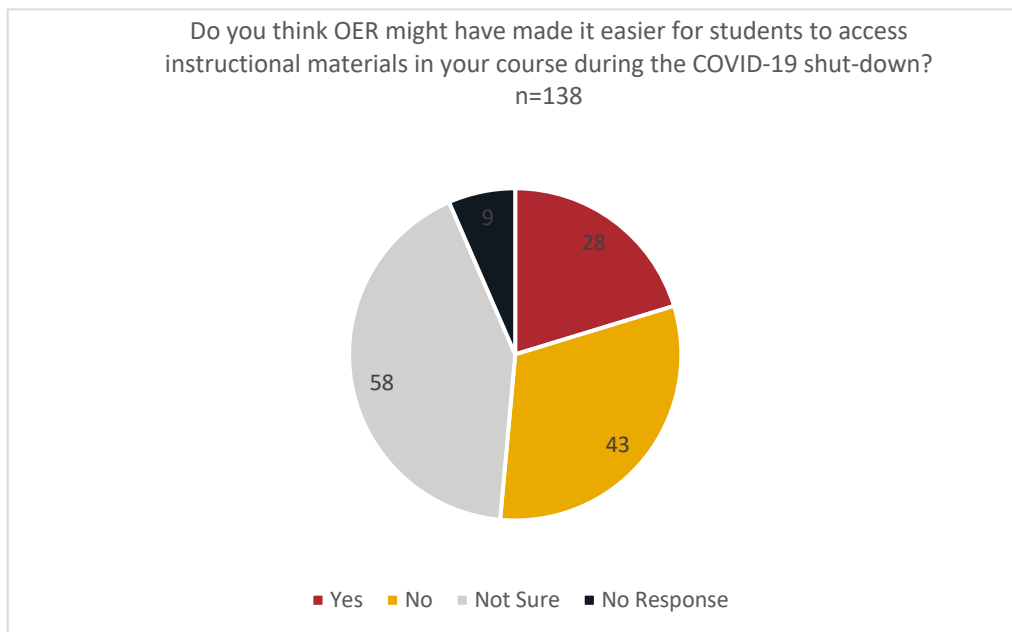
Of those who were not sure whether OER might have improved student access to instructional materials, the most common explanations provided were:

- Unfamiliarity with OER in general;
- Inability to find acceptable OER materials for their course;
- Never looked for any OER material in their course.

Almost 40% (43) of the people in this group responded that they <u>did not</u> think that OER might have improved students' access to instructional materials in their courses during the COVID-19 shutdown. The two primary reasons cited for this were that 1) their courses already had online resources that the students were using prior to the shutdown, and 2) there were not adequate open educational resources in their subject areas. Additionally, one person commented that OER did not meet the needs of at-risk students, in particular, due to their lack of access to online materials.

I have attended OER seminars and in my opinion, they do not meet the needs of at-risk students. Many of our students were struggling to get working smart phones, computers, and Wifi service.

A total of 20% (28) of the respondents in this group <u>did</u> feel that OER might have made it easier for their students to access their instructional materials. Respondents felt that this would have eliminated the financial barrier to students unable to purchase textbooks and may have given the students a bit more diversity in their instructional materials.

When this group of faculty who <u>had not</u> used OER in their courses was asked if they thought OER might have made it easier for *them* to transition to remote teaching during the Spring 2020 semester, they responded as follows.

- Yes – 15% (21)
- No – 43% (60)
- Not Sure – 35% (48)
- No Response – 7% (9)

Do you think OER might have made it easier for you to transition to remote teaching during the Spring 2020 semester? n=138
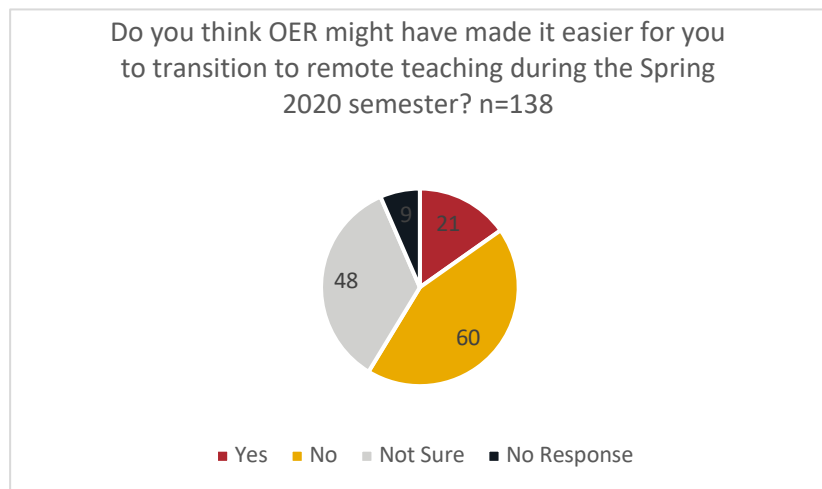
Of those who were <u>not sure</u> of if OER would have made their transition easier, the following explanations were provided:

- "I am not sure of the content and protocol associated with OER."
- "I will explore what OER are available and applicable to my courses."
- "Have no experience with OER materials."
- "My problem with OER is that for a price of essentially, nothing, they ask professors to work to pull online sources into a platform that is scattered and disorganized. This creates more work for both professors and students."

These themes were also picked up in some of the responses from people who thought that OER would not have make it easier for them to transition to remote teaching.

- "OER resources are generally inferior and more limited than purchased products, depending on the subject of the course. I know that this is true for the course I was (and will be teaching). Supplementary materials are generally weaker in OER. Usually, the topic is treated in a very generic way that may not apply to specific courses."
- "Researching OERs necessitates careful vetting, verification, and validation to ensure efficacy in learning. This process is both time and human resource intensive. Given the speed and unexpected negatives and impacts of COVID-19, OERs introductions on such a short timeline were an unacceptable alternative."
- "It was a nightmare transition to start with and our courses are so heavily lab- and clinical-based that we are just finishing one course now. Excess resources and finding others would have been so time consuming. I am already doing 60-hour work weeks."
- "Finding OER materials that suit me takes longer to find and piece together than it does for me to create things myself."

Discussion

Lack of awareness about openly licensed materials and discovery processes was a recurring theme in the responses. Given the number of people who were unfamiliar with OER in general or had never sought out any OER materials for their courses, it may be worthwhile to look for more opportunities to raise awareness about the information, guidance, and resources available through the M.O.S.T. Initiative.

Some respondents also associated OER with online resources when discussing students' lack of access to reliable internet during the move to remote teaching in the spring. While it is true that much OER is only available in an online/digital format, it may also be the case that some respondents simply conflated OER and online. Further examination of this hypothesis would be useful.

There also appeared to be a distrust among respondents related to the quality of OER materials as well as concern about the work involved in finding/reviewing/vetting resources. Further work is needed to understand this apprehension about quality in relation to respondents' specific disciplinary areas and course level (lower-division versus upper-division courses). The findings also suggest that the M.O.S.T. initiative should work with institutions across the state to address concerns about the time investment involved in the use of OER, perhaps through discipline-specific faculty collaboratives that might alleviate demands placed on individual faculty.

APPENDIX: Survey Questions

Student Access to Instructional Materials During COVID-19 Emergency Remote Teaching

Thank you for participating in this survey of faculty who taught a course during the Spring 2020 semester. Your responses to this survey will help us better understand the extent to which our institutions' move to remote teaching in response to COVID-19 in the Spring 2020 semester impacted students' access to instructional materials for your course. It should take you less than 5 minutes to complete.

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. We are not collecting any personally identifiable information. To the extent that it might be possible to identify individuals, your answers to the questions will remain confidential and findings will only be shared in aggregate. If you have any questions about this survey, contact Dr. MJ Bishop, Director, William E. Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation at the University System of Maryland (most@usmd.edu).

Clicking NEXT below indicates that you understand the nature of the survey and that you consent to participate.

1. What is the name of the INSTITUTION where you work?

2. Did you teach a course during the Spring 2020 semester?

    Yes, If yes, continue to question 3 | No, If no, bump out to thank you page

3. OER are freely available, fully accessible instructional materials that either reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits the use, revision, improvement, and redistribution by others. OER include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support learning (adapted from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's definition).

    Did you use OER in any of your courses during the Spring 2020 semester?

    Yes -> 4,5 | No -> 6,7

4. Do you think incorporating OER into your course made it easier **for students** to access instructional materials during the COVID-19 shut-down?

    Yes | No | Please explain your answer

5. Do you think incorporating OER into your course made it easier **for you** to transition to remote teaching during the Spring 2020 semester?

    Yes | No | Please explain your answer

    Go to end of survey

6. Do you think OER might have made it easier **for students** to access instructional materials in your course during the COVID-19 shut-down?

    Yes | No | Not Sure | Please explain your answer

7. Do you think OER might have made it easier **for you** to transition to remote teaching during the Spring 2020 semester?

    Yes | No | Not Sure | Please explain your answer

Go to end of survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey! Please click SUBMIT to send your responses.