

OER FINAL PROJECT

1. Brief description of your project: objectives, activities, impact

Our project entailed finding appropriate YouTube videos to be used in our OER Communication Arts course. This is essentially a course that focuses on public speaking and communication skills and so the videos are speech examples of various styles and in varying contexts. Additionally, some of the videos selected focus on the theory component of the course. For example, it may be an expert explaining the use of appropriate language in preparing an informative speech. This option of watching a speech rather than reading the required material is preferred given that it provides students with another opportunity to analyze a speaker and thus works toward the achievement of the course learning outcomes.

We reviewed all videos currently in the syllabus, in addition to finding new sources of input, which fall under a Creative Commons license. Given that our project is limited to videos, (and not a text or article), there was no need for modifications, so even the “No Derivate Works”, which is the most restrictive of all the CC licenses could be used. Following the same logic, the “Share-alike” license is not one that we paid much attention to given that no derivatives of the work will be produced. On the other hand, we will be sure to satisfy the conditions of the “Attribution” license by referring to the source of the video on the syllabus, which all students have access to through the university’s course communication tool (Blackboard).

In summary, the objective of our project was to find appropriately licensed videos to be used in the Communications Arts course where curricula relevance is the only inclusion criteria. We tried to find videos from a variety of sources to add diversity in input and make the most of the abundance of material available.

2. Relevance of the project for you and for your institution

The course we are working on already consists of material that is OER based. This material includes books, articles, samples, handouts, rubrics and videos. Our main goal was to make sure that all video sources are OER, to replace those that are not, and to find new sources. The relevance of this project should first be considered in light of the greater OER movement our institution is currently a part of.

The implementation of OER is not just limited to one course at NDU. The Communication Arts course falls under the umbrella of a campus range project, with the involvement of several stakeholders. As part of the university strategic plan, all faculty deans at NDU are required to select specific courses in their respective departments and redesign those courses based on OERs. The successful completion of this project is intended to serve as testimony to the

ability to find relevant and appropriate OER that satisfy the learning outcomes of the course, with little or no compromise to the overall vision of the program. In other words, it is contributing towards the successful completion of step one. Once the syllabus design phase is completed, attention can turn to evaluating the impact of OER in the classroom – on both the instructors and students. For example, do instructors feel more at ease using OER as opposed to a traditional textbook? Do students notice the varied sources of input and does it effect their motivation and attitude? Are the videos chosen relevant in terms of student needs? Does student performance improve with OER? On a more administrative level, does implementing OER across campus courses affect student retention? Last but not least, what impact does a curricular change as such have on the accreditation process at NDU?

On the instructor level, this project has ensured that we as instructors enter our classrooms with a syllabus that has been designed with our students and their differing needs, interests, culture and age in mind. It works towards a student-centered approach to learning and moves the focus of the course to the achievement of the course outcomes that have been envisioned by the course coordinator and instructors with the students in mind. This project has indeed highlighted the flexibility and freedom OER offers instructors; we are now consciously aware of the lack of limitations and lack of restriction in selecting input that satisfies curricula objectives and at the same time, reminded of the restrictions that come with the use of a single, commercially-produced textbook.

The advantage offered to us at NDU is the absence of rigidity of institutional factors particularly pertaining to syllabus pace; instructors are granted the freedom to move at the pace deemed necessary by their students and the learning environment they face. Transforming, evolving and re-inventing the learning environment and learning-teaching approaches requires such flexibility and makes the integration of new technologies more successful. It frees instructors of the pressure of completing certain learning outcomes and assessment tasks within a specified time. As a result, we are more likely to be innovative in our teaching approach as well as our sources of input.

3. Main results of the project

The main results of this project are a revised syllabus for the Communication Arts course that has rich and varied sources of input. Most importantly, all input was selected and decided upon in light of our students and their needs, again, stressing the student-centered approach to education. Their age, culture, language proficiency and interests were all taken into consideration as videos were selected. No single, commercially-produced textbook, one made for a global audience not to mention a native-English audience, can offer the variety of input and relevance of input that OER does. What's more, knowing that if one chosen video does not serve its purpose in the classroom as intended, it can be replaced with another is practical, convenient, and keeps the focus of the course where it should be. This flexibility arms us with the advantage of continuously tweaking and adjusting our syllabus so that videos shown in class remain of current issues as well as of interest to the students. With this project we have, to the best of our

ability and bearing in mind our minimal experience with OER, contributed toward the achievement of a much larger institution-wide objective.

4. How these results will be used in your teaching coursework / syllabus design –

The objective of this project was to contribute relevant and appropriate OER to the current Communication Arts syllabus to make the achievement of the course learning outcomes all the more attainable for our students and to do so in the most interactive and inviting way possible. The videos that we have chosen as part of this project will be used by all the instructors of this course, and their feedback at the end of the semester will ultimately determine if the criteria upon which they were selected is appropriate.

Furthermore, bearing in mind that videos were selected with a conscious effort to ensure that not only their cultural relevance is identifiable but also the themes, these sources of input should be updated from semester to semester to ensure time relevance. The presentation the classroom material in terms of students' cultural and individual framework strives for the integration of material in such a way that it is received by students relative to their context, thus encompassing the Open Educational Practices.

5. How these results will be promoted within your university –

On an institutional level, the results of this project will be promoted through symposiums and conferences organized by our institution. This offers us the opportunity to discuss strengths and difficulties, challenges and obstacles we all face as the different stakeholders. NDU also holds an OER week, which is open to all, where again, different stakeholders discuss and share their experiences with OER and most interestingly, the feedback of the students and their perspectives are shared so that the any misconceptions can be dispelled and future objectives can be decided.

On a more intimate level, a course level, the suitability of the OER videos that we have included as part of this project will be discussed among instructors and the coordinator of the course. Of course, the input of students is also valued and can shed light on issues we may have overlooked in selecting the input. It is hoped that the successful implementation of this project as part of the Communication Arts course will be a source of motivation and inspiration for other English courses to follow in the same footsteps.

6. Conclusions, challenges encountered and lessons learnt

All in all, our task was a simple one in the sense that we weren't working on modifying material; however, the complexity of this project was associated with the selection of videos that we could only assume (based on past experience and personal intuition) would be both interesting and appealing to our students. We were not much concerned with facing the issue of cultural ambiguity since

Lebanese students, in general, are exposed to international issues, events and incidents. Therefore, our main concern was that the topics we selected are of interest to them suffice to engage them in the classroom activity and promote a more effective and efficient learning / teaching environment.

Although the course instructor is encouraged to use the material as stated in the syllabus, he/she can substitute material depending on their particular students' needs and interests, especially given that s/he is trained in using and finding open educational resources. This is one of the many advantages of working for a higher educational institution that places great trust in the capabilities and endeavors of its faculty.

Similarly, in continuing in the spirit of being active participants and producers, we (all instructors of this course) can upload some of our students' written work such as their speech drafts and speech outlines, with their knowledge and permission of course. Not only would we be contributing actively and be more than just consumers in the world of OER, but students will feel that their work matters beyond the classroom, which can have numerous effects - primarily serving as a source of motivation. Typically, students do the work that is assigned, instructors grade it, and then the work is returned to the student who then disposes of it. With the opportunity to upload and share work, students' own assignments become renewable; they can be shared to exemplify the speech-writing process which can be used in a variety of different contexts. Perhaps an instructor from another institution may choose to use this work as an example of what is expected, or perhaps to highlight his/her own learning outcomes. When we give students' assignments meaning that surpasses the assessment task we are changing the traditional teaching/learning model, which is the very essence of OER. Including students in the OER initiative will do more than give them a sense of responsibility in doing their work, it will raise their awareness of the world of sharing and openness and how they can be a part of it both today and tomorrow.

Designing a student-centered syllabus and adopting student-centered teaching methodologies is an on-going process that requires constant modifications, updating and also an effort on the instructor's part keep the students at the center of the educational program. In addition to exposing us to an abundance of relevant resources that would definitely revamp our current programs, OER offers us the flexibility to adapt resources – and this is where the true transformative power of OER lies. We hope that in the coming semesters we have the opportunity and encouragement of our colleagues to reap all the benefits the world of OER has to offer us.