Open Education Librarianship: A Position Description Analysis of the Newly Emerging Role in Academic Libraries

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Abstract

According to the latest Babson Survey, *Freeing the Textbook: Educational Resources in US Higher Education*, "faculty awareness of OER has increased every year, with 46 percent of faculty now aware of open educational resources, up from 34 percent three years ago" (Seaman and Seaman 2018). While open educational resources (OER) gain traction with faculty who are looking to lower costs for their students and re-engage with their pedagogy, academic libraries are creating a variety of open or affordable textbook programs to help increase the use of OER or low-cost materials as replacements for high-cost traditional materials. Some libraries are creating specific positions to support these initiatives that aim to help faculty who want to adopt, adapt, or author OER. As more of these roles emerge, it raises questions about what the field perceives as the role of an Open Education or OER librarian, and the support that libraries provide OER initiatives. To explore these concerns, I collected position descriptions for librarians whose role it is to support OER initiatives into a corpus. I applied deductive thematic analysis to code it while investigating four main questions: 1) What

inspires academic libraries to hire OER-related support? 2) What skills do they anticipate applicants to possess? 3) Where do these positions fit within the organization chart of the library? 4) Is there a standard scope of work that emerges from the corpus? In addition to these four questions, this research also explored the expectations for librarians in these roles to change faculty's perception of OER through outreach and if they are expected to run burgeoning grant initiatives to launch adoption, adaptation, or authoring efforts at their institution.

Keywords: open education librarianship, open educational resources, perceptions, OER grant initiatives, OER outreach

Bibliotecología en educación abierta: un análisis de descripción de posición del nuevo rol emergente en las bibliotecas académicas

Resumen

Según la última encuesta de Babson, Freeing the Textbook: Educational Resources in US Higher Education, "la conciencia de los docentes sobre los REA ha aumentado cada año, con un 46 por ciento de los docentes ahora conscientes de los recursos educativos abiertos, en comparación con el 34 por ciento hace tres años" (Seaman y Seaman, 2018). Mientras que los recursos educativos abiertos (REA) ganan fuerza con el profesorado que busca reducir los costos para sus estudiantes y volver a comprometerse con su pedagogía, las bibliotecas académicas están creando una variedad de programas de libros de texto abiertos o asequibles para ayudar a aumentar el uso de REA o materiales de costo como reemplazos de materiales tradicionales de alto costo. Algunas bibliotecas están creando posiciones específicas para apoyar estas iniciativas que tienen como objetivo ayudar a los docentes que desean adoptar, adaptar o crear REA. A medida que surgen más de estos roles, surgen preguntas sobre lo que el campo percibe como el rol de un bibliotecario de Educación Abierta o Recursos de Educación Abierta, y las bibliotecas de apoyo brindan iniciativas REA. Para explorar estas preocupaciones, recopilé descripciones de puestos para bibliotecarios cuyo papel es apoyar las iniciativas REA en un corpus. Apliqué análisis temático deductivo para codificarlo mientras investigaba cuatro preguntas principales: 1) ¿Qué inspira a las bibliotecas académicas a contratar apoyo relacionado con REA? 2) ¿Qué habilidades anticipan que poseen los solicitantes? 3) ¿Dónde

encajan estas posiciones dentro del organigrama de la biblioteca? 4) ¿Existe un alcance estándar de trabajo que surge del corpus? Además de estas cuatro preguntas, esta investigación también exploró las expectativas de los bibliotecarios en estos roles para cambiar la percepción de los REA por parte del profesorado a través de la divulgación y si se espera que ejecuten iniciativas de subvención para lanzar iniciativas de adopción, adaptación o autoría en su institución.

Palabras clave: biblioteconomía educativa abierta, recursos educativos abiertos, percepciones, iniciativas de subvención REA, divulgación REA

开放教育图书馆学：一项针对学术图书馆中新兴角色的职位描述分析

摘要

据最新的巴布森调查（Babson Survey）出版的书籍《免除课本费用：美国高等教育中的教育资源》，"教师对开放教育资源（OER）的了解每年都在增加，46%的教师如今已经了解OER，这一数字在三年前为34%"（Seaman and Seaman, 2018）。OER对那些寻求减少学生费用并重新进行教学参与的教师而言具有吸引力，与此同时，学术图书馆正在创建一系列开放或可负担的课本计划，帮助增加OER或低成本材料的使用，以替代高成本的传统课本材料。一些图书馆正在设立特定职位，以支持这些旨在帮助想要采用、改编或编写OER的教师的倡议。随着更多这类角色的出现，相关疑问也随之产生，即该领域认为开放教育图书馆员或开放教育资源图书馆员的作用是什么，以及图书馆为OER倡议计划提供的支持是什么。为探究这些疑问，我收集了那些以支持OER倡议融入语料库为职责的图书馆员的职位描述。我用演绎性主题分析对其进行编码，同时调查了四个主要疑问：1) 是什么启发了学术图书馆招聘相关人士提供OER支持？2) 它们所期望的应聘者应具备的技能是什么？3) 这些职位在图书馆组织结构图中占据什么位置？4) 语料库中是否有一个标准的工作范围？ 除这四个疑问之外，本研究还探究了对这些图书馆员的期望，即通过外展服务改变教师对OER的了解，以及图书馆员是否应管理新兴经费倡议以启动各自机构中采用、改编或编写OER的相关工作。

关键词：开放教育图书馆学，开放教育资源，观念，OER经费倡议，OER外展服务

Introduction

When new roles in academic libraries emerge to meet the changing needs of their institution, it is common for librarians to analyze position descriptions to get a sense of the challenges, needs, and trends that these new positions represent. Academic libraries created a new position focused on supporting open and affordable education in response to the textbook affordability crisis. A national survey, *Freeing the Textbook: Educational Resources in US Higher Education* reports that "61 percent of all faculty, 71 percent of those teaching large enrollment introductory courses, and 73 percent of department chairpersons, 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' that 'the cost of course materials is a serious problem for my students" (Seaman and Seaman 2018). The position created within the library dedicated to supporting faculty transitioning to open and affordable educational materials is the Open Education Librarian or Open Educational Resources (OER) Librarian. This study looks at library position descriptions for these emerging roles within academic libraries to answer the following questions: What is the impetus for libraries to hire for OER-related support? What skills do they anticipate applicants having? Where do they position these roles within the library? Is there a standard scope of work that emerges from the corpus? Do these roles focus on grant initiatives, outreach, or a combination of both? By using both deductive thematic analysis and inductive thematic analysis, this research project investigates these questions.

Literature Review

While there has been no other job analysis done on Open Education and OER Librarian position descriptions, there is a long-standing tradition of position analysis in library research to draw on. For this project, I consulted both job analysis studies for other newly emerging positions, like Instructional Design Librarian and Data Librarians, and a broader study by Triumph and Beile (2015) for context on general library hiring trends. The studies consulted were Shank's (2006) work on the analysis of Instructional Design Librarians position descriptions and Neeser and Theilen's (2019) work on the analysis of Data Librarian position descriptions. Shank's (2006) work provided me with an expectation about what the prospective search and collection of position descriptions might yield. His study notes two challenges that make collecting data about newly emerging positions more complex than roles long established in academic librarianship. The first challenge is that "there is no agreed-upon, authoritative consensus for defining the title of the position, the qualifications, or the responsibilities" (Shank 2006, 517). The second challenge is that "it was necessary to search many diverse sources starting from the period when the first position announcement was listed" (Shank 2006, 518). With these factors noted, I created inclusion criteria that set a date range for when the positions were posted and took advantage of a broad swath of sources to collect position descriptions. The other reality that Shank's

(2006) work prepared me for was that there might not be very many position descriptions to analyze since the role of Open Education or OER Librarian was so new. In Neeser and Theilen's (2019) work, I identified the methodology for the project —deductive thematic analysis—and a modifiable Master Codebook. Their presentation "Using Deductive Thematic Analysis to Examine Textual Documents" lays out not only what deductive thematic analysis is, but also how one can use it to code library position descriptions. In addition, Neeser and Theilen (2019) demonstrate what a large corpus of positions would look like and give a percentage of how much to code, in their case 10%, before revising the identified codes. In their Master Codebook, they provide operational definitions for each code and instructions for how to code for each theme identified (Neeser and Theilen 2019). Before starting the analysis, I also needed to learn more about coding data for themes. To do this, I identified literature that explained what specifically thematic analysis looks for and practical guides on how to do a thematic analysis, such as Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) "Doing A Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-By-Step Guide For Learning And Teaching Scholars" and Bree and Gallager's (2016) "Using Microsoft Excel To Code And Thematically Analyse Qualitative Data: A Simple, Cost-Effective Approach," which lead to discovering Braun and Clarke's very explicit guide on how to conduct a thematic analysis. While doing the deductive analysis of the data, I realized that in order to answer the question about the required skills that successful applicants would have, I needed to do an inductive thematic analysis of the skills to see what themes organically arose from the data, so I reviewed these guides again to plan for an inductive pass.

Method

For this project, I collected library position descriptions requesting applicants to apply for positions that support the adoption, adaptation, and authoring of OER within the library to build the corpus for analysis. I then applied both deductive and inductive thematic analysis in order to code the positions to answer the research questions. In order to prepare for the collection of position descriptions, I established inclusion criteria that the job advertisement must be for a full-time position located in an academic library in the United States, 50% of the job responsibilities or duties must be related to OER, and the advertisement must have been posted between 2017 and 2019, plus a curated dataset of position descriptions created by Fields et al. (2014a) at the BC Summit on Open Textbooks, which is maintained as new positions get posted. I chose to include this dataset for two reasons: due to the ephemeral nature of job description postings and because it was impossible to tell when a listing initially was posted unless there was a date included. I collected position descriptions through postings on listservs, the OER digest, direct emails, and many major job-listing websites. After the cutoff collection date, there were thirty-three position

descriptions to analyze. After deduplication and removing descriptions that were inaccessible, twenty-four positions remained for analysis.

Drawing on the six phases of thematic analysis from "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," the first step was to become familiar with the data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 87). Before tackling familiarity, however, it was essential to identify some codes and attributes before starting so that the analysis was deductive (Nesser and Thielen 2019). As such, I established that the starting codes would be:

1) Does the position description list why the library is hiring for this position?

2) What are the skills required for the position?

3) To whom does this position report?

With those initial codes in place, it was time to become familiar with the data—in this case, the corpus of position descriptions collected. The first question was easy to code for with a simple "yes" or "no," and if "yes," then "explain the rationale." The third question was also easy to code for and in the same vein had a "yes" or "no," and "if yes, list the title of the position this applicant would report to." The second question, however, required much more care, as the list of skills listed in the position descriptions varied greatly. For the skills section, it became quickly apparent that I needed to do an inductive pass of the data in order to identify the skills and any thematic overlap they

might have. In order to answer the skills question, I did the first pass at coding the skill data and ended up identifying fifty-one skills across the twenty-four position descriptions.

Then themes were identified across those fifty-one skills and were fit into nine thematic categories that organically emerged from the data. The categories are Scholarly Communication, Publishing, Instructional Design, Open Education, Web Development, Outreach, General Librarianship, and Other. An "Other" category was created for skills that were specific to open education but did not fit into the other categories. For example, some positions called directly for experience running or establishing start-up initiatives, or experience in working in a grassroots environment. In my experience, asking such might suggest that while they are hiring for a position, their initiative is most likely new and the position will be outreach-focused at first, in order to build a community around open education.

After applying those categories, the next step was to identify a possible overlap of skills between categories. Some skills did overlap; in particular, skills that were in the Scholarly Communications section often overlapped with skills listed in the Open Education or Publishing sections.

At this point, it was time to start recording the data for the twenty-four position descriptions. To do this, I modified the Master Codebook created by Nesser and Thielen (2019) for their dataset for data librarian position descriptions by swapping out the

Table 1. Skills—bulk first pass

Project Management	Sustainability Plan
Grant Writing	Leadership
Open Educational Resources (OER)	OER Repositories
Licensing	Permissions
Copyright	Evaluation of OER
Social Media	Liaison
Collaboration	Independent Work
Instruction	Teamwork
Instructional Design	Salary
Pedagogy	Prioritization
Open Access	Programming Language
Trends and Issue related to Open Education	Start Up Initiatives
Outreach	Embedded Librarian
Searching for OER	Library Guides
Assessment	Community of Practice
Program Development	Supervision
Open Education Week	OER Working Group / Committee
Workshops	Reference Desk
Legislation	Institutional Repositories
Accessibility	Open Access Week
Policies	Open
Publishing	Positive Service Attitude
Environments – grass roots	Fair Use
Learning Management System	
Enthusiasm	
Web Development	
Track cost savings	
Conference Planning	

Table 2. Skills—thematic categorization

Category	Skills
Scholarly Communication	Licensing, Copyright, Fair Use, Open Access, Legislation, Policies, Institutional Repositories, Open Access Week, Permissions,
Publishing	Project Management, Program Development, Publishing
Instructional Design	Pedagogy, Instructional Design, Assessment, Accessibility, Learning Management System,
Open Education	Sustainability Plan, Track Cost Savings, OER Repositories, Searching for OER, Evaluation of OER, OER Working Group/Committee, Community of Practice, Open
Research	Grant Writing, Trends and Issues Related to Open Education,
Web Development	Programming Languages, Social Media, Web Development, Library Guides, Web Page Maintenance,
Outreach	Open Education Week, Workshops, Outreach,
General Library	Instruction, Reference, Leadership, Independent work, Teamwork, Embedded Librarian, Supervision, Reference Desk, Enthusiasm, Positive Service Attitude, Conference Planning, Liaison, Collaboration,
Other	Start up Initiatives, Environments – Grass Roots,

Table 3. Skills—thematic overlap

Project Management (P) (OE) (GL)	Sustainability Plan (OE) (P)
Grant Writing (R)	Leadership (GL)
Open Educational Resources (OE)	OER Repositories (OE)
Licensing (SC) (OE)	Permissions (SC) (OE)
Copyright (SC) (OE)	Evaluation of OER (OE)
Social Media (P)	Liaison (GL)
Collaboration (GL)	Independent Work (GL)
Instruction (GL)	Teamwork (GL)
Instructional Design (ID)	Salary (GL)
Pedagogy (ID)	Prioritization (GL)
Open Access (SC)	Programming Languages (WD)
Trends and Issue related to Open Education (R) (OE)	Start Up Initiatives (Other)
Outreach (O)	Embedded Librarian (GL)
Searching for OER (OE)	Library Guides (WD) (GL)
Assessment (ID) (OE) (WD)	Community of Practice (OE)
Program Development (P) (OE)	Supervision (GL)
Open Education Week (O) (OE)	OER Working Group / Committee (OE)
Workshops (O) (GL)	Reference Desk (GL)
Legislation (SC)	Institutional Repositories (SC)
Accessibility (ID) (WD) (OE) (P)	Open Access Week (SC) (O)
Policies (SC)	Open (OE)
Publishing (P) (OE)	Positive Service Attitude (GL)
Environments – grass roots (other)	Fair Use (SC) (OE)
Learning Management System (ID)	Web Page Maintenance (WD)
Enthusiasm (GL)	
Web Development (WD)	
Track cost savings (OE)	
Conference Planning (GL)	

data librarian themes for the identified open education themes. They ended up with forty-one codes in their position descriptions, but because of the weird overlap that Open Education positions have with traditional librarianship and scholarly communication, this projected ended up with fifty-three codes from the position descriptions.

Discussion

The first theme coded for using deductive analysis (analysis tied to pre-defined questions) was to ascertain if the position descriptions list why the library is looking to hire someone to advocate for open education at their institution. Only four of the position descriptions provided a rationale for the library's interest in creating the role. The rationales ranged from a new strategic direction, a continuation of their commitment to reducing the cost of attendance for its students, or a new commitment to advancing open education and OER. The overall lack of rationales provided in the position description suggests that the libraries posting these positions may not feel the need to explain their rationale, have not explored their need to hire for these positions, or do not feel that it is necessary to divulge that information in the position description. From this corpus, it is unclear as to why libraries are hiring for

these positions, but I believe that while not explicitly stated in the job postings themselves, it is fair to assume that it is partially because of the increasing trend of affordability initiatives in higher education. It would be interesting to pair this research with an in-depth look at the strategic plans of the institutions posting these jobs in the future to see if the positions match up with the strategic priorities of the library or more broadly the institution.

The second deductive theme about the skills that libraries think are required to do the work of an Open Education Librarian or OER Librarian required an inductive analysis pass to identify the skills and place them into thematic categories to start to try and identify a scope of work. Looking at the fifty-one skills from across the twenty-four position descriptions, it is challenging to say precisely what the work looks like in each institutional context. As noted in the Methods section, the resulting nine categories of work—Scholarly Communication, Publishing, Instructional Design, Open Education, Web Development, Outreach, General Librarianship, and Other—give a sense that the work has not yet really coalesced into a standard scope of work. Some of the positions weighed heavily toward outreach to raise awareness about OER, some of the positions weighed heavily towards establishing, maintaining, and assessing burgeoning publishing programs, whereas others are still kitchen sink positions with many general library duties thrown in on top of having an overarching OER focus. One goal of this research was to

figure out if there was a standard scope for an Open Education Librarian, and if so, what it is. Based on the results of coding the data, it is likely too soon to tell, but what is apparent is that there are outreach positions, there are publishing positions, and there are combinations of both. Outliers among the positions were descriptions that included experience with grant-writing that were tied to positions that were either grant-funded (for example the NC Live position) or had responsibilities for making sure that the programs initiated met legislative mandates (for example the California State University Dominguez Hills position). Some positions were half related to open education and half related to more traditional librarianship, like reference and instruction. The expected breadth of skills candidates should have in order to fill these roles may also be a significant indicator of the potential for burnout in these newly emerging positions. From my own experience, it was challenging to balance undergraduate library instruction with a burgeoning grant-based publishing initiative. It will be interesting as more librarians work in new open education positions to see how they change over time and maybe even coalesce into specific types of open education librarianship (for example, Open Education Outreach Librarian, Open Education Publishing Librarian, etc.).

The third deductive theme coded for was whom the applicant would report to if hired. Of the twenty-four position descriptions analyzed, sixteen listed whom the applicant would report

to directly. Four of the positions would report directly to the Library Director, Executive Director, or Associate University Librarian. The rest would report to the head of a department. Some of the departments included are Outreach & Instruction, Digital Scholarship, and Electronic Resources & Scholarly Communication. I expected that most of the positions would fall into the Scholarly Communications departments of these institutions (if they have one); it was surprising to me when they did not. My surprise stems from the fact that the overlap between Scholarly Communication (often the support mechanism for Open Access [OA] initiatives around open publishing research) and Open Education (OE) is extensive. I recommend Anita Walz's (2019) chart "Differentiating Between Open Access and Open Educational Resources" for a more in-depth look at how OA and OER overlap and differ. However, some commonalities for librarians in both of these roles would be performing outreach duties, advising folks about copyright and licensing, and potentially supporting academic publishing. The broad swath of potential managers in these position descriptions might also suggest that libraries do not yet know where these positions fit within the library unit.

Conclusion and Future Research

In conclusion, it is clear that while these roles in academic libraries are becoming more prevalent, a standard scope of work has not yet emerged across academic librarianship. As more and more librarians take on these roles fulltime and work on defining the scope of what they do in these roles, perhaps a standardized scope will emerge over time. However, note that there is currently an attempt to standardize a baseline position description for an OER librarian/advocate that includes specific responsibilities, skills, minimum qualifications, and preferred qualifications, which serves as an excellent starting point for writing a position description for this work (Fields et al. 2014b). The data shows that there are several ways of scoping the work that librarians commonly perform in these position descriptions, mainly publishing, outreach, or some combination of the two. It is also worth noting that there is also no standardized reporting structure for these positions. Instead, it varies library by library, based on their institution's specific context. This study is not representative of all of the librarians who work as advocates for open education or OER at their institutions. Because of the small dataset and its focus on position descriptions, the study misses a whole subset of librarians currently working who shifted into these positions or have had these duties added to their workload. It would be interesting to follow up this study with one that interviews librarians who are working in these positions and hear directly from them about what skills they brought to the table as applicants, or what skills they have gained while working in this area. It would also be intriguing to learn what the reporting line of their position is, and what the culture at their institu-

tion was that led to a focus on leading open initiatives.

With this initial pass through the corpus complete, it is clear from the preliminary findings that this data could answer other research questions. For example, it would be interesting to explore how positions serving state consortia or statewide initiatives differ from positions that do not have those responsibilities or to look at the array of titles to see how different academic libraries are labeling this work in their institution. It would also be interesting to look at the data to see how many of these positions were temporary, temporary with a continued appointment as a possibility, or permanent. The corpus of position descriptions (https://drive. google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1242Az-5rjiCz9FCMHXXC9ORMFRocWx-4Gw) are available for other researchers to use or other administrators who want to write position descriptions for this kind of work at their institution. After cleaning up the data, I also intend to make the Open Education Master Codebook available to other researchers. It will include both a template for other researchers to use to replicate this work with their research questions and the data generated by this research project so others can see how I coded the position descriptions in this project.

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