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Humanities in the Open: The Challenges of Creating an Open Literature Anthology

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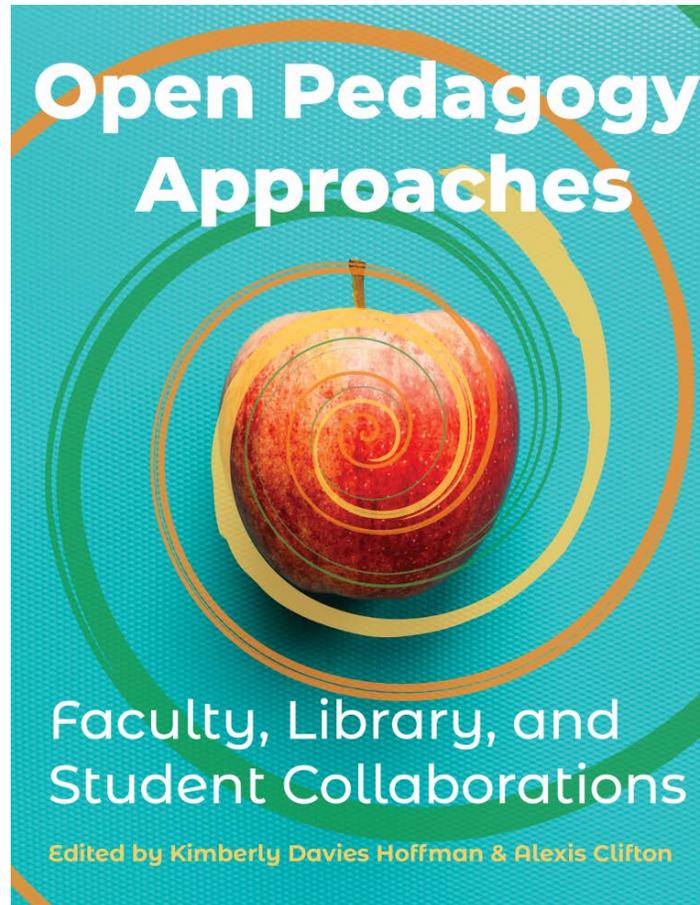
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OPEN PEDAGOGY APPROACHES: Faculty, Library, and Student Collaborations



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HUMANITIES IN THE OPEN: THE CHALLENGES OF CREATING AN OPEN LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY

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Project Overview

Institution: [University of Central Florida](#)

Institution Type: public, research, undergraduate, postgraduate

Project Discipline: Humanities

Project Outcome: literary anthology

Tools Used: Institutional Repository

2020 Preface

Six months into the year and 2020 has been witness to some of the most transformational events to take place in generations. The COVID-19 pandemic caused universities to move entirely online in a matter of weeks (in some cases days), countries world-wide went into lockdown, and the highest rate of job loss since the great depression hit the United States. During this global crisis, the US erupted in protest over the murder of George Floyd, Jr. at the hands of a Minneapolis Police Officer. As universities discuss how best to resume classes in the fall and the US debates how to fix its systemic racism, it seems strange to further advocate for the implementation of an OER...but this is 2020 and “change” and “strange” might best characterize this year. With these pivotal events in mind, we would like to reiterate that the challenges of creating an OER, as discussed in our chapter, do not begin to outweigh the benefits of making education more affordable and culturally relevant.

The past few months have underscored the need for openly accessible course materials. Many students and faculty at the University of Central Florida, and institutions globally, had challenges accessing textbooks and other course materials when courses rapidly transitioned online in March. With libraries’ physical buildings closed, there was no access to print course material. With face to face courses cancelled there was not an option for students to share texts. Compacted with accessibility, the need for affordable course materials for students (many of whom are facing financial challenges) is even more necessary. OERs pose many difficulties, but the world we are currently living in desperately needs access to free, open, and critical educational resources.

In addition to affordability and accessibility, our chapter argues that designing an anthology around the idea of “radical familiarity” allows readers to make connections between historical literature and current socio-political events. As the United States faces difficult realizations about the embeddedness of racism in its culture, society, and institutions (including higher education), consciously making room for diverse student voices not only within the course, but also in the selections and introductions to the readings is essential for equity in education. Integrating topics such as police brutality, the role of “monuments” in a society, systemic oppression, “traditional values,” and governmental policing/control into a course and its anthology is not simply a pedagogical approach to critical thinking, it is a cultural duty of social justice to confront racism and actively advocate and practice anti-racism.

What is in store for the second half of 2020, let alone the rest of the decade, is anyone’s guess.

However, it is in times like these that information, literature, critical connections through diverse perspectives, and the availability of resources for intellectual pursuits become that much more important. In the end, we believe that the challenges of creating an OER pale in comparison to what you are able to offer students and society in general.

—Christian, Lily, Sarah, John

Textbook affordability and Open Education Resources (OER) have become increasingly important as educators search for ways to decrease costs while providing access to the best possible resources. One solution is to incorporate open access and public domain materials into classes across the curriculum. We addressed these issues in an English Literature survey course at the University of Central Florida. A team of librarians, an instructional designer, and a literature professor collaborated to replace a traditional anthology with a text that students could access for free. While this project has been a success, our team had to overcome a variety of obstacles related to copyright and intellectual property, issues that might provide challenges for anyone interested in adopting an OER.

This chapter will discuss the process of building an OER from scratch and the pedagogical implications of incorporating an open anthology in a literature course. Traditional anthologies supply the reader with historical context and authorial background—both important aspects of a literature survey course. They run through literary history in a linear and temporally cogent fashion, precisely the methodology that seeks to understand history and culture through the lens of literature. To be clear, we are not arguing against a historical approach or the intermingling of history and literature in a survey course. Rather, we suggest that remaining firmly and solely bound to a historical context in a literature course denies the contemporary reader the ability to engage with texts in dynamic ways and make connections between texts and contemporary culture. In many ways, this dynamic approach to the study of a literary text mirrors the process of how we built our open anthology. The building process, as well as the text of the anthology itself, is what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as “rhizomatic.” In other words, our discrete departments and specializations are connected by and through the issues we encountered—i.e., locating open source material; dealing with Creative Commons licenses; obtaining copyright permissions and identifying quality translations; building the anthology including platforms, access, and the scalability of constructing a cohesive collection of texts; as well as working with our university’s General Counsel. In the end, the rhizomatic connections found in the anthology are a product of the connections made in the development process and continues, in its pedagogical use, to produce new connections that exceed the voices of its initial creators to include the diverse learners using the text.

As a term that originated with underground organic plant structures, the rhizome was given new conceptual

life through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980/1987).¹ Much like the plant structure, the conceptual rhizome connects seemingly disparate and unrelated objects, ideas, or concepts through unseen, “underground” routes. Just as two blades of grass on opposite sides of a large yard are connected through complex underground root structures, the process of creating an open anthology, with its multifaceted authorial, legal, and technological issues, creates connections within (and beyond) the university structure, establishing an unforeseen network of production that highlights, rather than effaces, the labor of librarians, staff, students, and faculty.² An anthology, as we imagine it, is always growing and changing. Consequently, this project remains in flux. As the needs of the class change, so too can the anthology. This chapter then summarizes the origin and current state of the project and concludes with a look toward the future of the always-changeable anthology. The latest update of the [English Literature anthology](#) (Beck et al., 2019), and soon a second OER for World Literature, can be found through STARS, the University of Central Florida's institutional repository.

The University of Central Florida's textbook-affordability efforts have included participation from a variety of campus units. In particular, UCF Libraries and the Center for Distributed Learning (CDL) found that we had many similar goals and perceived barriers when supporting textbook affordability. With this, the two units formed a partnership. Starting in 2015, a working group composed of three librarians and two instructional designers met regularly to coordinate efforts related to textbook affordability. The group also included other librarians and instructional designers for specific projects that helped support faculty in transitioning to free, library-sourced, or low-cost alternatives to traditional textbooks. The working group focused on both macro and micro efforts related to textbook affordability. While the macro efforts primarily focused on informing UCF leadership about efforts at the local, state, and national level, the micro efforts reflected a grassroots approach to promoting textbook affordability to individual faculty (deNoyelles et al., 2017). One such effort included campus presentations.

In spring 2016, the working group conducted an OER workshop at the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL). While several attendees expressed interest, none were prepared to abandon their traditional textbooks at the time. One instructor expressed concern about losing access to introductory material, annotations, and discussion questions while another worried about the time commitment involved in creating new course content from scratch. Both of these issues, we would learn, are common barriers to OER adoption. Shortly thereafter, we expanded the scope of our outreach by sending a call for participation to the departments

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1. For a full discussion of the rhizome's characteristics and conceptual function, see Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987, p. 3-25).
 2. Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) write, “A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (p. 7). By working together and creating an ever-changing textbook, we are, in effect, subverting the established power(s) of the textbook industrial complex.

of English, Art, and History. While the call generated some interest and appreciation for our efforts to address textbook affordability, only one faculty member was prepared to revamp his courses at the time. Dr. Christian Beck, a Medieval Literature professor—and co-author of this chapter—was the only one to express interest in replacing the *Norton Anthology* he had been using in his English Literature survey course with an OER that students could access and use for free.

The multifaceted nature of this project necessitated strong collaboration from a diverse team including the literature professor, an instructional designer with the CDL, a humanities librarian, a scholarly communication librarian, and a scholarly communication adjunct librarian. To begin the process, Dr. Beck had lengthy discussions with the Humanities Librarian, John Venecek, regarding the types of texts the course needed—approximately twenty-seven separate texts, ranging from the Early Medieval Period to the eighteenth century, which included texts such as *Caedmon's Hymn*, Shakespearean sonnets, and Robert Herrick's *Hesperides*. Even though these are well-known works, finding public domain editions was more complicated than expected. Although we could not cite directly from the *Norton Anthology*, it served as a reference for finding public domain versions of the preferred sections of works. For example, certain works had alternative titles or nuances in translations that made our search more difficult unless we were already familiar with the content of that particular work. This work fell primarily to the Scholarly Communication Adjunct Librarian, Lily Dubach. She initiated the first search, looking through library databases, open access repositories, and other sources to find open materials for the OER. She provided a detailed, color-coded spreadsheet to function as a starting point for John Venecek who stepped in to conduct follow-up searches for the harder-to-find texts and texts requiring permissions.

In the beginning, copyright status and permissions seemed straightforward. Since all the works were written before 1923, they fell into the public domain. However, there were several instances in which Dr. Beck preferred specific translations, formatting, annotations, and stage directions. These preferences raised legal questions, requiring permission from individual copyright holders. Most allowed use of their work with attribution for educational purposes. In the rare cases where we could not obtain written consent, we provided a full attribution in the online course and maintained records of our efforts to secure permission. These entries, however, would eventually be removed from the final edition due to lack of permission. Additionally, we wanted to maintain rigorous standards, and several instances presented quality-control challenges. Most notably, we could not locate a suitable translation of *The Wife's Lament*, so Dr. Beck translated and annotated [the poem](#) (Beck, 2017) then assigned a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License to his work. Before making this translation accessible worldwide through STARS, Sarah Norris, Scholarly Communication Librarian, discussed with Dr. Beck the variety of Creative Commons licenses available to apply to his translated work. Ultimately, he chose a more restrictive license, which allowed anyone to access and use the work for research purposes but that restricted commercial use of his scholarship. It is important to note that this particular license was more restrictive than the broader English Literature anthology, which was licensed with a more open and flexible CC BY 4.0 license. Because of this, the anthology needed to provide a link to *The Wife's Lament* in STARS instead of including the full-text directly. This was

an important lesson in developing future OER texts and assigning appropriate and aligned licensing. In the end, every OER team could work to create one Creative Commons-licensed text in an attempt to increase the availability of texts to be used in open source projects like this one. This would continue the trend of teams working together to help other (unknown and possibly unrelated) teams create projects that make literature more widely available.

In addition to quality control, we were equally concerned about creating a seamless, readable, user-friendly product. The first stage of this process involved compiling hyperlinks to library-sourced materials from various databases, e-books, repositories, and a variety of online resources. We gathered this information in spreadsheets with permalinks to the source material. However, the final product needed to be more than a mere reading list with links to resources on websites and platforms of varying quality. With this in mind, the Instructional Designer, John Raible, converted the literature into a streamlined, consistently-formatted PDF that could be downloaded on a variety of devices and would not require an internet connection, all the while ensuring the accessibility of the document. This also provided consistency for Dr. Beck who could direct the students to specific passages, discoverable via keyword searching, that they could then highlight and annotate. In this way, the collection would be a fully-functional electronic text.

The original incarnation was limited to the English Literature survey course where students could download the book for free. Dr. Beck began using the customized text in the spring of 2016. Since then, it has been used eight times reaching 493 students for a total estimated savings of \$34,510. As impressive as these totals are, the anthology was not yet a true OER. An authentic OER should be able to connect people and projects beyond a single course, department, or university; it should be accessible to anyone looking to engage with literature and should be a source through which new connections can be established—thus, fully embodying the rhizomatic nature of the text. Much like the pedagogical approaches discussed below, the availability and versatility of the text are key features of a true OER. To achieve true OER status for our anthology, we sought to broaden the scope of the project by uploading the collection to STARS, our institutional repository. This process, however, would raise several issues that would be more complicated than anyone anticipated and result in us making contact and connections with other members of the university. First, some content had been retrieved from library-licensed databases and e-books, which are restricted to UCF students, faculty, and staff. Second, the rights we initially received from the copyright holders had been limited to use in the survey course. As a result of this new scope, we had to conduct a second review of the selections to ensure that none of the content was from library-licensed resources. We also had to obtain a second round of permissions from the copyright holders before we could make their content available in STARS. In most instances, we succeeded in locating open source material and in gaining the necessary permissions, but there would be more unanticipated and increasingly complex issues that we would have to negotiate before we could make this anthology widely accessible.

Throughout the development of this project, including the work to make the anthology widely accessible through STARS, we were in constant contact with UCF's Office of General Counsel (OGC). Though we were confident in addressing copyright concerns and obtaining permissions, we also felt it was appropriate to

engage with the OGC for additional oversight and recommendations regarding the licensing for the anthology. Like our initial perceptions of copyright status and permissions, we assumed this process would also be straightforward. However, our interactions with legal representation revealed a variety of considerations that we had not yet anticipated.

During our initial conversations with the OGC, we discussed general copyright concerns and addressed any questions OGC had regarding public domain, Creative Commons licenses, and copyright permissions obtained from the copyright holders. Beyond this were broader discussions regarding ownership and faculty research. Currently, the UCF Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) does not explicitly address OER as a part of faculty research (*UCF*, 2015). Such research is typically considered an exception within the CBA; however, the OGC noted that any work, regardless of intended purpose, that relied on appreciable university support (which in this case included librarians and instructional designers) may become the intellectual property of the university. With this in mind, we engaged in conversations about OERs, their intended use, and existing copyright within such works. Ultimately, we decided not to make the anthology widely available through STARS until summer 2019 due to the complexities discussed with the OGC. Further, these conversations and guidance from the OGC have prompted us to approach assisting faculty with copyright clearance differently moving forward in order to avoid any potential concerns regarding appreciable university support. While the goal of making the anthology accessible was delayed, we are pleased that this was eventually accomplished and that students at UCF and other institutions can benefit from this freely accessible anthology.

The nuances of working with open source texts in a class have far-reaching implications as well. Unlike a traditional static text, the dynamic nature of an anthology such as this means that it can (and should) change as the needs of the course change. For this reason, our project does not end with the text simply becoming available: The students must also actively engage with the material in dynamic ways. The learning experience of the text ought to mirror the connectivity and teamwork that were manifest in building the OER. As a result, new collaborative and integrated pedagogical approaches must be part of how the anthology is used.

From a pedagogical perspective, collections of literature are, on the one hand, useful tools as a “one-stop shop” for all your literary needs. Anthologies supply all the literature you want students to read in a single text, uniformly presented and standardized. On the other hand, the anthology presents an issue of exclusion: The problem is not what to include, but what to exclude from the collection. Hand an anthology to any literature instructor and he/she will undoubtedly state something to the effect of, “Oh, I wish it included [fill in a title here].” Indeed, it is impossible to include everyone’s favorite pieces in a single text, but using public domain or openly accessible materials to build a collection of primary sources that suits the individual instructor’s needs makes this goal achievable. Additionally, an OER that is available to everyone should be flexible enough to support new additions (or editions) that make the text timely, engaging, and relevant to contemporary readers.

Part of what allows us to develop an OER is the various digitized literary pieces found in digital repositories. As the initial iteration of this anthology testifies, library digital resources are a great place to start. Many of the texts that were originally included in the collection were subscriptions and permissions acquired for UCF

students, faculty, and staff and could be easily included in the anthology for local use. This means, even from the outset, the new literary collection is digital in nature: We are using new technologies to produce a powerful pedagogical tool that has the potential to be something more than the traditional linear, static collection of literature. Rather than simply engage in a “repetition of the same” by producing a digital version of its analog, printed predecessors, our digital anthology combines literary texts sought through open access means, as well as other online digital material that are freely accessible and connected to the text through permalinks.³ Due to its digital nature, our anthology can link to, include, and expand on resources that exceed the traditional compilation of literature. Many free online resources can be used to enhance the learning process and by including them in the collection, students connect to the content in more dynamic ways, a practice we refer to as “radical familiarity.”

When encountering historically distant literatures for the first time, many students find it easy to enumerate the differences in a piece’s attributes, characterizations, structure, plot, setting, and even language. However, asking students to make connections between the text and our contemporary moment is a more challenging and pedagogically productive exercise. Through this experience of radical familiarity, students often find that a text that might have previously seemed unrelatable or difficult to understand becomes familiar and accessible in surprising ways. This type of radical familiarity overcomes the objections of a type of literature being too old or irrelevant for our contemporary culture and creates connections between the past and the present. Dr. Beck models this approach in his written introductions to individual texts contained in the collection. For example, in the World Literature I anthology, he discusses how women may make their voices heard in the introduction to *Lysistrata* and provides a link to an article examining the effectiveness of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Twitter feed. This and other connections are not made lightly or superficially but rather through clear argumentation and textual support, and students are asked to engage in the same type of thinking. By encouraging students to see literature as radically familiar and interconnected, they not only learn about the historical context and discourses in which the literature was produced, but also view contemporary issues, writing, and culture as a confluence of literary, cultural, and historical events. By opening the educational discourse to allow for new connections, we can create fresh forms of reading and writing about the past. Again, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) write, “Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (p. 5). In other words, the class as a whole (instructors,

3. “Repetition of the same” is a phrase used by Gilles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. Deleuze (1968/1994) differentiates between two types of repetition: One that is “static,” “revolving,” and “ordinary” and the other “dynamic,” “evolving,” and “distinctive” (p. 23). Deleuze (1968/1994) writes, “In every case, repetition is difference without a concept,” but, he states that in one instance there is a “difference between objects represented by the same concept”—i.e., an Open Access anthology that is structured precisely like previous anthologies—and in another instance the repetition “includes difference, and includes itself in the alterity of the Idea, in the heterogeneity of an ‘a-presentation’” (p. 24). Indeed, I am suggesting that we engage in a form of repetition by producing an anthology but contained within the repetition is a distinctive difference, something that is “dynamic” and “evolving.”

teaching assistants, and students alike) create new ways of viewing the world, investigate unexplored territories, and use the connections made through the course as a catalyst for future knowledge, change, and socio-cultural insight. This act of creation then becomes a part of the OER itself.

As a means to make the text performative in its openness and malleability, the students are presented with a final group project in which each group chooses a piece of literature we have read during the semester and seeks external content that they believe shares discursive similarities to the chosen text. They must write a brief introduction to the external content; describe, in detail, how the content relates to the piece; and explain the socio-cultural importance of the relationship between the content and the literature—i.e., why should people be aware of this connection and how does it enrich our cultural or intellectual heritage? After the projects are completed, all the projects are made available for everyone in the course to view. The instructor composes a (compulsory) survey and asks students to vote on the most interesting and relevant project. The project that receives the most votes will be embedded into the anthology for future classes to use. This project, an example of radical familiarity, allows the anthology to grow and change every semester and to become a rhizomatic text. Through the inclusion of student voices, the anthology grows in dynamic and unforeseen ways. The diversity of voices challenges the idea of who can construct, write, and edit a collection of literary artifacts. While students might not have the “expertise” or “specialization” of a literature professor, the inclusion of intergenerational voices that can link literary content to an ever-changing plane of cultural media expands the anthology into new territories most likely unfamiliar to those with siloed specialties. This approach has the added benefit of keeping the collection relevant and engaging for future audiences.

As discussed above, however, the rhizomatic text does not end with its expansion and changes. As an OER, this anthology’s changes become available to people and projects beyond our course. This means that the new additions, as authored by the students themselves, become available and accessible to unknown audiences. There are two important implications here: 1) the anthology is no longer “authored” by the OER team, and 2) rights and permissions must be sought from the new authors (i.e., students). This element of the text/course is a new addition and will not be set to test run until next academic year (2020-2021), so we have not yet had to deal with this iteration of the text or these obstacles—as we said in the beginning, this project is very much in flux. Our idea for the future of this anthology is to have an organically grown and dynamically organized text that highlights the work of all facets of a university structure: librarians of all ranks and specializations, students, faculty, instructional designers/technical advisors, legal advisors, and web designers. The product can then be accessed and built upon by other groups only to incite new ideas and projects that this singular text could have never anticipated.

In the end, the open access, rhizomatic anthology does not just deliver content, it is an interactive, self-guiding pedagogical instrument that exceeds the specialist’s lone voice by including and reflecting the voices and experiences of culturally diverse learners. The navigation of “rules” in the developmental process of the OER leads to a text that defies the “rules” not just of a traditional anthology, but also of the standard literary historical survey course. The only “rule” of this new literary assemblage then is that it should never be static. The unchanging text “imposes the verb ‘to be’” and insists upon a singular form of truth, whereas “the fabric

of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and...and...and...’” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 25). Mirroring the connections created through collaborations among librarians, instructional designers, faculty, and legal counsel, our anthology reflects our ever-changing and increasingly connected world and is dynamic enough to adapt to these changes. Much like our world, our project is in flux, and the work we put into its creation continues with new iterations, changes, and connections. As a product of our collegial connections, new socio-cultural literary connections are forged, which when added to the OER, help us create and make visible the connections between students, faculty, educational resources, educational staff, and technological staff. The OER is more than an open resource for all to use and experience; its very production is a testament to the open collaboration and connections among all university personnel, with the hope of shaping unforeseen connections beyond our university.

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