A Case of “Many Hands Make Light Work,”
or “Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth”?
A Departmental Journey of Shared OER Creation

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The Course: Historical Methods

• Need for Change
  • Student avoidance until senior year
  • Need for Remediation

• Reimagined Course
  • Intro level – required upon declaration of major
  • Scaffolded skills workshops
  • Introduction to the historical profession
  • Career opportunities
Student Success Component

- University required course for transfer students
  - Campus Resources
  - Skills for Success
  - Career/Job Search Information
  - Introduction to the Field/Profession

- Merged with Historical Methods
  - Overlap with Methods
  - Additional skills covered
  - Common learning outcomes
Problem 1
No Adequate Textbook Options

- Traditional texts oriented toward full-length paper, which was no longer tenable
- More students needing remedial skills
- Research methods evolve quickly in digital age
Problem 2
Accommodating Varied Approaches

• Department prioritized single $0 resource

• However, faculty approach skills instruction differently

• Most faculty teach the course in rotation – so synthesis a necessity
Why not write our own?

• Resolves textbook dilemma and $0 materials cost
• Standardizes materials for common requirements/learning outcomes across sections
• Leverages faculty strengths and departmental preferences
• Easy to revise as needs change
• Plus, support and grant money from UTA Libraries!
Yikes! What were we thinking?

- The Initial Plan
  - Faculty materials that were beautifully written and insightful
  - Embedded materials from student success OERs remixed and blended within new content
  - Embedded style guide carefully curated from existing OERs
  - A masterpiece!

- The Nightmare Reality
  - No coherence
  - Wordy and too in-depth for undergraduate use
  - Just didn’t work and did not reflect the course as taught
  - Best parts posted in LMS as pdf handouts
Panic: A Powerful Motivator

• An OER text (if you could even call it that) in disarray
• A commitment to a “no cost” course (with students already enrolled) in jeopardy
• An over-committed faculty....

What else to do but jump in?
A Fresh Perspective

• Analysis: Too much coverage from too many authors, but missing key features

• Response: Narrow the focus; start by asking “what do MY students need?”
What (and who) did it take?

• ~15+ years experience in Methods instruction - structured new format

• “Under Construction” label permitted “just in time” publication of some segments

• Grad student tech expert (and other staff and faculty supporters) created ability to focus on content, not presentation (or copyright, or legalities...)

• Trust in the future (and fellow instructors) to improve text
Dollars and Cents

• Generous UTA Cares grant for original OER creation
• Faculty contributors received stipends for their work and time
• GTA assigned to work on OER rather than acting as course TA
• Load reduction and stipends for author/editors
• Library sponsorship of Pressbooks and H5P account
Current and Future Developments

• Additions and edits based upon suggestions made by students and faculty instructors piloting the text

• Recently added materials from new faculty on public history and digital history

• Final copy edits completed

• Official publishing is imminent

• Students working on a companion “History Major Handbook” in Methods this semester
Conclusions: Light Work or Spoiled Broth?

• The answer is “yes” – to both
• Production of original content is easier when leaning into faculty expertise
• But there needs to be a small team – the visionary, the grad student techie, and the editor – to make a useable and accessible textbook
• And don’t forget the expertise of OER librarians!
Contact Us

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